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Determinants of Sustainability of Rural Tourism: A Study of Tourists at Kumbalangi in Kerala, India

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Abstract: It is widely recognized that tourism is a sector with immense potential economic development and employment generation. Hence, tourism is seriously encouraged by the Governments the world over, particularly in the developing nations. International agencies like World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimate that nations like India and China would become the superpowers in the global tourism map by the year 2020. In spite of the excellent tourism resources in India, the country could not utilize its vast potential because only during the last two decades tourism has been getting due attention in India. While China has already attained a prominent position in global tourism, the progress of India has been slower. India has to traverse a long way to catch up with the top players, including China. In respect of Kerala state in particular – one of the states with the highest tourism resources in India – the situation is more chronic as Kerala's performance in tourism has not at all been commensurate with its enviable tourism resources. A recent study of the present author has revealed the vast prospects of rural tourism for employment creation and economic development in the context of 'Kumbalangi' – a rural tourism destination in Ernakulam district of central Kerala and the first model tourism village in India. As a continuation of the above study another recent study by the author has made an empirical analysis of the effects of rural tourism on the environment and local community. In fact, the above two studies have underscored the immense development potential of tourism on the one hand and the utmost need for preserving the quality of the environment. This study, a continuation of the above two studies, seeks to analyse the feedback of the tourists to understand the factors influencing the sustainability of rural tourism, its prospects and challenges, and allied aspects from the perspective of the tourists visiting the destination, and to suggest strategies for sustained development of rural tourism and hence national economic development.

Keywords: *Tourism Competitiveness, Rural Tourism, Local Community, Environmental Sustainability, ICT.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely recognized as a vital industry with immense potential for employment generation and economic development. Hence, it is an effective means for faster development of nations, particularly the developing nations like India. Globally, tourism is ranked second highest in terms of income generation, next to the oil industry. World over, tourism has transformed considerably from its earlier motivation i.e. religion and business to being a part of one's life style, even within research of classes other than aristocracy. Tourism is one of the world largest and most rapidly growing industries. Increased leisure and higher purchasing power have combined to enable more people take into tourism. Thus it has become an accepted part of life style of a number of people. Hence every country has a decisive role to play in tourism, and tourism industry projected as very valuable particularly for the development of international transport and communication. Of late, tourism industry is receiving good attention as a foreign exchange earner and in most parts of the world it is promoted today primarily for the purpose of earning of foreign exchange. The disbursement of tourist expenditure on accommodation, food, transport, recreation and so on has a linkage effect leading to the overall development of a country. The percentage of receipts from international tourists in relation to gross national product is an indicator of the importance of tourism. After independence the

focus of attention of the Government of India was on development of such important sectors as agriculture, industry, infrastructure etc. So tourism was never seen as a potential business in India and it was growing at its own space. Only since the last two decades or more, tourism is being seriously promoted by the Government of India. Hence, Indian tourism could not exploit the vast tourism potential of the country. Kerala state too has been very late in tourism promotion, and in spite of its enviable tourism resources the state is lagging far behind many other states in India mostly with much lower level of endowments in tourism. Rural tourism has got an excellent market potential in India, particularly in states like Kerala, because of the huge demand from foreign tourists. However, rural tourism has not yet developed in India as the Government has not taken up any systematic initiative to attract the foreign tourists. Although tourism has been getting added attention since the last two decades, rural tourism is never accorded any priority in India, and Kerala is no exception. In rural areas various products of diverse nature viz. historical, heritages, natural-based, medication-based, cultural-based and man-made – all having great tourism development potential are available. If the existing constraints are removed this huge potential could be utilized to their fullest extent. There are some classic examples whereby some countries have exploited their rural tourism potential for economic development; all being religious and historical types of rural tourism products which offer great space for rural development. In Kerala, the state with an enviable level of tourism resources in the whole of India, it is relevant to study of the prospects of rural tourism particularly at ‘Kumbalangi’– the first model tourism village in India. So, this study focuses on the prospects and sustainability issues of rural tourism with respect to Kumbalangi, from the perspective of the tourists visiting there.

II. RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The development potential of tourism is well recognized the world over, particularly that of rural tourism which helps to bring about rapid rural development and hence balanced and equitable economic development. A recent research paper by the present author Manoj P K (2015) [19] has revealed the vast development potential of rural tourism at Kumbalangi. As a continuation of the above paper the author, Manoj P K (2016) [20], in a more recent paper has studied the impact of rural tourism on the environment and society based on the feedback from the local community. Accordingly, the author has highlighted the obvious benefits to the local community because of rural tourism, and at the same time warned about the adverse effects of the same to the environment which in turn might affect its long-term sustainability unless remedial measures are duly initiated. The present paper is a further extension of the earlier two papers, [19] and [20], and it seeks to study prospects and sustainability issues of rural tourism from the perspective of tourists visiting this spot. The relevance of the present study emanates from the following facts: (i) Kerala is only in the seventh position among the states and union territories in India as of 2014 with a share of just 4.09 per cent of the total number of foreign tourist arrivals to India, and (ii) the share of foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala as a percentage of the foreign tourist arrivals to India has been constantly on the decline, from 4.35 per cent (2012) to 4.30 per cent (2013) and further to 4.09 per cent (2014). In this context, it is quite relevant to make a detailed study of the pattern of tourist arrivals to Kerala vis-à-vis India, particularly in respect of foreign tourists; and to make an empirical study of the sustainability of rural tourism from the perspective of the tourists.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- (i) To study from a global perspective the pattern of tourist arrivals to Kerala vis-à-vis India as whole, particularly the foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala and to identify whether there is a declining trend in the foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala;
- (ii) To assess the comparative growth pattern of Kerala tourism vis-à-vis Indian tourism and global tourism, with special reference to foreign tourist arrivals;
- (iii) To assess the prospects and challenges, and sustainability of rural tourism based on the feedback from the tourists with reference to ‘Kumbalangi’ – a major rural tourism destination in Kerala and the first model tourism village in India; and

- (iv) To suggest strategies for the sustainable development of rural tourism and hence faster regional economic development based on the analysis of the feedback from the tourists and also other broad findings of the study.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (i) Whether the growth pattern of Kerala tourism is comparable to that of Indian tourism and the broad global tourism trends?
- (ii) Is the share of foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala vis-à-vis India has a clearly declining trend necessitating remedial measures?
- (iii) What are the major limitations and challenges affecting the sustainability of rural tourism in ‘Kumbalangi’ as could be assessed from the opinions of the tourists (both domestic and foreign) visiting this rural tourism destination? What factors have influenced (determinants) the tourists while they have chosen a tour to ‘Kumbalangi’ rural tourism destination?
- (iv) What strategies could be suggested for sustained growth rural tourism ‘Kumbalangi’ based on the feedback from tourists?

V. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study is descriptive-analytical in nature and is exploratory too. Both primary and secondary data are used for this study. Primary data are collected using a sample survey at Kumbalangi, a major rural tourism destination in central Kerala, the respondents being tourists (both domestic and foreign) visiting this tourism spot. A representative sample of 100 tourists comprising of 70 domestic tourists and 30 foreign tourists is selected for this study, using random sampling method. Accordingly, primary data are collected using a pre-tested, well-structured questionnaire. Secondary data are also used for the study and these are sourced from the publications of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), World Economic Forum (WEF), Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), Kerala State Planning Board, the tourism statistics published by the Government of Kerala and Government of India, industry reports published by reputed agencies like FICCI, IBEF etc. statistical tools are used for data analysis. Popular statistical tools are used for data analysis.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

From the review of the existing literature on tourism it is noted that globally there has been an increasing focus on the adverse impact of tourism on the ecology and environment. Worldwide, the Governments have initiated tourism for developmental needs, with greater attention on preserving the environment. This trend is very clear since the mid-1980s. The implications of tourism initiatives on the society at large is often studied from a socio-ecological perspective and the conceptual model suggested by Brundtland (1987) [2] called ‘Ecologically Sustainable Development Framework’ is employed for the above purpose. This framework is being used globally for managing various crucial tourism-related development issues. ‘Ecotourism’ (ecologically sustainable tourism) and its variants like rural tourism and responsible tourism are fast gaining popularity worldwide.

Norton G. (1987) [19] opined that many people who travel to natural areas do so specifically to indulge in experience with nature, regardless of what activities they choose to do. Lane (1991) [12], has noted that such eco-tourism projects should strive for providing satisfying jobs to the local community without adversely affecting the environment. Mc Neely et. al. [14] and Brandon (1996) [7] hope that tourism may instill a sense of local pride to villagers and may promote or strength cultural heritage. Bhatia (1993) [3] in his book ‘Tourist Development – Principles and Practices’ has noted that the underdeveloped region of a country can greatly be benefited from tourism development. Many regions of the world have areas of excellent scenic beauty and are highly culturally attractive too, though such regions are economically backward. These areas if developed for the use by tourists can bring in prosperity to the local people. This tourism development process reduces regional imbalances by creating more income and employment in the less developed and depressed areas. Healy, Robert G. (1994) [10] has noted that most constituents of the tourism commons are subject to tourists and locals as ‘free riders’; the most vulnerable being BTEs

(Basic Tourism Elements), the natural environment and infrastructure. However everything depends on the power of government to restrict “free riding” incidents through various mechanisms such as resources use regulation and pricing. The lack of rules and/or their inadequate implementation in several countries victimize many components of the tourism commons. Lindberg and Enriquez (1994) [13] cited several examples of local earnings from tourism related employment surrounding protected areas in Belize, Nepal, Costa Rica and Australia. In Nepal, for instance, two thirds of the residents’ families at Sagarmatha national parks earn livelihood from guiding tourists, sale of local goods and cloths as well as arranging accommodation to them. Besides economic benefits, tourism contributes towards improving inter-cultural appreciation and understanding for both host communities and tourists. Coccossis, Harry. & Nijkamp, Peter. (1995) [6] noted that the extension of tourism affected many tourism spots and numerous activities ranging from transporting to nourishing of people. The social, economic and environmental impact of tourism are numerous and diverse. Clark (1991) [5] discerns a shift in the understanding of eco tourism. He argues that there has been a paradigm shift from the original understanding of ecotourism as being small scale, educative and minority interests towards an understanding of sustainable tourism that requires best practice by tourism operations of all sizes in terms of minimizing their impacts on environment. Ajith Kumar (1998) [1] has studied the psychographic, demographic and life style features of tourists reaching Kerala. It is stated that spending pattern is a part of the life style characteristics of tourists since spending is determined by demographic factors, income group and psychographic factors like purpose of visit and especially the motivations to visit Kerala.

Ferhan (2006) [8] has observed that the rapid development as well as high concentration of tourism activities result in adverse effects on the natural and cultural environment, and when investment of locals is minimal or lacking, the outcomes would be especially unacceptable to the host community. Singh, Ratandeeep (2008) [24] in his book ‘Tourism Marketing – Principles, Policies and Strategies’ has discussed in detail the various dimensions of tourism marketing. It is pointed out that as tourism industry is mainly services-oriented and labour intensive, it is a major source of employment. It generates wide range economic activities and hence provides direct socio-economic benefits through enhanced employment opportunities.

Manoj P K (2008) [15] in his research paper, ‘Sustainable Tourism in India: A Study from a Global Perspective with Focus on Tourism Prospects of Kerala’ has made a macro level study of the prospects of sustainable tourism in Kerala from an international perspective and offered some strategies for the faster growth of sustainable tourism initiatives in Kerala. Oommen M. A. (2008) [21] has pointed out the danger of overlooking the environmental sustainability in development initiatives in the context of Kerala state in India. The author while referring to the growing environmental problems in Kerala from the broader perspective of the development of the state (viz. Kerala model of development) he has specifically noted in detail various environmental and ecological issues that the state faces at present. The present scenario is referred to as ‘Ecological Overkill’ in his paper and four major dangers emanating from this situation have been pointed out as (i) serious damage of the hydrological cycle, (ii) high distortion of the vast coastal system of the state of 580 km, (iii) high destruction of the unique, extremely distinguished, rich and diverse natural resources as well as bio-diversity which together constitute a beautiful agro-eco system; and (iv) highly consumerist society that throws out heavy solid, liquid and medical wastes. This growingly worsening situation has adversely affected the sustainability and future prospects of rural tourism and its variants like responsible tourism in Kerala. Manoj, P. K., (2009) [16] in his research paper ‘Environment Friendly Tourism for Sustainable Economic Development in India’ has studied the vital significance of tourism for faster economic development of India and has suggested strategies for environment-friendly and sustainable tourism development in India. In another research paper by this author viz. Manoj, P. K.(2010) [17] entitled ‘Tourism in Kerala: A Study of the Imperatives and Impediments with Focus on Ecotourism; the case of tourism sector in Kerala state in India is studied with a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the tourism sector. Strategies for faster and sustainable growth of tourism in Kerala are suggested by the author. In another study by the author Manoj P. K (2015)(a) [18], entitled ‘Prospects of Eco tourism in Kerala: Evidence from Kumarakam in Kottayam District’ an empirical study of ecotourism is made and a few suggestions for sustainable development of ecotourism based on the findings of his study. Yet another study by the present author Manoj P. K (2015)(b) [19], entitled ‘Employment

Generation from Rural Tourism: A Field Study of the Local Community at Kumbalangi, Kerala' makes an empirical study of the response of the local community regarding the employment prospects arising from rural tourism, expectations of the tourists about the required Governmental interventions etc. The high prospects of employment generation and economic development and at the same time the need for enhancing the tourism infrastructure, primarily through Governmental initiatives, is highlighted in this paper.

World Economic Forum (WEF) (2015) [30] in its report 'The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report' makes a detailed study of the competitiveness of individual countries in the travel and tourism front at the regional and global levels in respect of various parameters. According to WEF report, the global competitiveness of Indian tourism is only 52 while that of China is 17, thus showing a wide gap between these two neighboring developing nations. At the regional level (viz. Asia Pacific region) too, there is large difference in competitiveness, because India is ranked in the 12th position while China is in the sixth position. In spite of the vast natural resources (17th rank), cultural resources (10th), unique intangible heritage (8th) etc. India's overall position 52th is very low because of poor rankings in respect of tourism-specific infrastructure (109th), health and hygiene (106th), ICT readiness (114th), safety and security (97th), desperately low level of environmental sustainability (139th) and so on. The report underscores the need for enhancing the tourism infrastructure in India, and more importantly ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism in India through preserving its environment and ecology. WTO (2015) [31] in its latest report, 'UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2015 Edition', has pointed out that China has been the fastest growing source market for tourism in the recent years. China has been ranked first in international tourism expenditure, third in international tourism receipts, fourth in international tourism arrivals. The four major players in global tourism have been United States, Spain, China and France. The growth of tourism in India has been 11 per cent as against 20 per cent for Sri Lanka. India has been one among the source markets that showed double digit growth in expenditure, though it is not one among the best 10 markets in terms of growth in expenditure. WTTC (2015) [32] in its latest report, 'Economic Impact of Travel & Tourism 2015 – Annual Update' has made an elaborate account of the relative performance of various countries of the world in the tourism front, including region-wise performance and future projections. WTTC has reported that South Asia, led by India and the Middle East, are globally the fastest growing regions in terms of the total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP. Accordingly, India is one among the bigger, fast growth markets along with China, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey. Besides, WTTC has reported that South Asia will be the fastest growing sub-region for total Travel & Tourism GDP long-run growth to 2025 (7.0 per cent) as India outpaces China.

In a recent empirical study by the present author, Manoj P. K. (2016) [20], "Impact of Rural Tourism on the Environment and Society: Evidence from Kumbalangi in Kerala, India", which in turn is a continuation of Manoj P. K. (2016) (b) [19], it has been observed that from the perspective of the local community members there are obvious benefits to the local community because of rural tourism, and further that the behavior of tourists to the local people has been encouraging. However, it has also been pointed out that there are adverse effects of rural tourism on the society and environment which in turn may adversely affect its sustainability in the long run. As high as 61.67 per cent of the local community members have felt that rural tourism would definitely degrade the natural environment.

It is noted that there are many studies on Indian tourism and a few on Kerala tourism, including some studies by the present author himself, viz. Manoj P K 2008 [15], 2009 [16], 2010 [17], 2015 (a) [18], 2015 (b) [19], and 2016 [20]. It is noticed, however, that empirical studies on the impact of rural tourism from the perspective of the tourists are virtually nil in the Kerala context. This is the research gap identified for this paper. As a continuation of the two previous research studies of the author viz. Manoj P K (2015) (b) [19] and Manoj P K (2016) [20], which covered the employment aspects of tourism, the governmental initiatives required for further expanding the tourism infrastructure, impact of rural tourism on the environment and society, and other allied aspects, this study seeks to make an empirical study of the prospects, challenges, factors

influencing the sustained flow of tourists etc. as could be assessed from the feedback from the tourists visiting Kumbalangi rural tourism in central Kerala.

VII. PERFORMANCE OF KERALA TOURISM: COMPARISON WITH NATIONAL AND GLOBAL TOURISM TRENDS

A recent report by the UNWTO (2015) [32] that contains data upto 2014 points to the gradually growing tourism activities taking place across the world resulting in constant and steady growth in international tourist arrivals as well as in international tourism receipts. For instance, over the 7 years' period 2008 to 2014, the index numbers (2008 = 100) in respect of international tourist arrivals have been constantly growing except for the year 2009 to reach 122 by 2014. Similar is the pattern of indices (2008 = 100) in respect of international tourism receipts which has also been growing constantly (except in 2009) to reach 119 by 2014. Table I shows the constantly growing trend in respect of foreign tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts in global tourism. It may be noted that over the last 7 years' period (2008 to 2014) there has been a steady and constant growth, but at a somewhat slow rate of about 4 to 6 per cent in global tourism in respect of international tourist arrivals and tourism receipts. (Table I).

TABLE I: Trend in International Tourist Arrivals and International Tourism Receipts (2008–2014).

Particulars	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
International Tourist Arrivals (Million)	928	891	949	997	1038	1087	1133
Index Numbers for Tourist Arrivals (2008 = 100)	100	96	102	107	112	117	122
International Tourism Receipts (USD Billion)	970	885	966	1081	1116	1197	1245
Index Numbers for Tourism Receipts (2008 = 100)	100	95	100	105	109	115	119

Source: UNWTO (2015), *Tourism Highlights 2015 Edition*, Spain. [32].

Following the global tourism trends in this regard, there is a constant growth in foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings in respect of both (i) India as a whole, and (ii) Kerala state in particular in the Indian union. As in the case of global tourism, there is a steady and constant growth in Indian tourism too in respect of both foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings. Moreover, for Indian tourism there has been a slow growth even for 2009, the slump year, and the growth rates have been quite higher than those of the global tourism. Accordingly, in respect of foreign tourist arrivals to India, the indices have gone up from 100 (2008) to as high as 160 (2014); as against 100 (2008) to 122 (2014) in respect of global tourism. In respect of Kerala tourism too, the corresponding growth indices are quite commendable and almost at par with Indian tourism, as it has constantly gone up from 100 (2008) to as high as 154 (2014), with a slight decline to 92 in 2009, the year of slump. Thus, the growth pattern of Kerala tourism is quite identical to that of global tourism. In short, in foreign tourist arrivals both Indian tourism and Kerala tourism have followed the global trend of constant growth, and their growth rates are quite higher than the global tourism trends. (Table II).

TABLE II: Trend in Foreign Tourist Arrivals to India and Kerala and Share of Kerala in Percentage (2008–2014).

Particulars	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Foreign Tourist Arrivals into India	14112590	14372300	17910178	19497126	18263074	19951026	22567650
Index Numbers – Foreign Tourist Arrivals into India	100	102	127	138	129	141	160
Foreign Tourist Arrivals into Kerala	598929	548737	659265	732985	793696	858143	923366
Index Numbers–Foreign Tourist Arrivals into Kerala	100	92	110	122	133	143	154
Kerala's Share of Foreign Tourist	4.24	3.82	3.68	3.76	4.35	4.30	4.09

Source: Computed from *Tourism Statistics* of Govt. of Kerala (2014) [34] and 2012 [35]; and Govt. of India (2014) [36].

From Table II it may be noted that the share of foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala as a percentage of those arriving to India is showing a fluctuating trend over the years. Though there is a constantly declining trend over the last two years in a row (2013 and 2014) the overall trend for the seven years' period 2008 to 2014 is that of gradually increasing in nature with a slight positive slope of 0.0419. Thus, it may be inferred that at present there is no indication of a long term declining trend in respect

of the percentage share of Kerala to the total foreign tourist arrivals to India, rather there is a slightly increasing trend too. (Figure I).

FIGURE I: Share of Foreign Tourist Arrivals to Kerala as a Percentage of those to India – Trend over the Period 2008–2014.



Source: Based on data computed from *Tourism Statistics* of Govt. of Kerala and Govt. of India (as given in Table II).

The status of Indian tourism, in terms of international tourism receipts, has been steadily on the rise over the years though at a slow pace. At the global level its position has improved from 37th rank in 2002 to 15th in 2014. At the regional (Asia Pacific) level the country's competitive position has improved from 13th in 2002 to 07th in 2014. Table I is self-explanatory in this regard.

In view of the foregoing analysis, it is meaningful to arrive at the following conclusions (against the first two objectives and first two research questions): (i) The growth patterns in respect of foreign tourist arrivals to India as a whole and Kerala in particular over the period 2008 to 2014 have been markedly better than the average global trend in this regard; (ii) Between India and Kerala the foreign tourist arrivals are quite comparable, though the case of India is relatively better; and (iii) there is no declining trend in the percentage share foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala vis-à-vis India, rather there is a slowly growing trend.

VIII. KUMBALANGI RURAL TOURISM DESTINATION IN KERALA – A BRIEF PROFILE

Kumbalangi is a well-known spot in the tourist map of India. Every year it serves a huge number of domestic and foreign tourists. A small island by nature it is surrounded by backwaters. It is chosen as the first Model Tourism Village in India. Profile of Kumbalangi is shown in Table III.

Table III: Profile of 'Kumbalangi' Model Tourism Village (Rural Tourism)

➤	Population: Over 30,000 and Area: 7 sq.km
➤	Altitude of the location: Sea level
➤	Revenue status of the location: Panchayat
➤	Revenue source: Tourism and Fishing
➤	One of the 32 global village selected by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
➤	The first among the 15 villages selected by the Government of India as Model Tourism Villages across the country.
➤	Vast stretch of backwaters connected by interlocking waterways to the whole of Kerala.
➤	Calm, quite and tranquil landscape with warm inhabitants
➤	Rich with exotic local cuisines, boat building and masonry, manual operated coir looms, fish farms etc.
➤	More than 100 Chinese fishing nets
➤	The first Panchayat Kerala to establish a system for effective waste management.

Source: Compiled from the Official records of 'Kumabalangi' Grama Panchayat

Kumbalangi offers high potential for house boat cruise, traditional boat race, fishing, adventurous water sports, swimming and various cultural programs. More than 100 Chinese nets are there in the backwaters that face the village. It gives a veritable treat to the visitors. Kumbalangi Rural Tourism Project is aimed at the promotion of preservation as well as conservation of the

environment (e.g. Conservation of mangroves). The mangroves, which separate the land from the sea, act as a breeding ground for prawns, oysters, crabs, small fish etc. 'Pokkali' farming is being revived in full swing at Kumbalangi. Pokkali farming is a cropping pattern wherein rice is cultivated for the first 6 months followed by fish farming for the subsequent 6 months. Under Kumbalangi Project an artists' village ('*Kalagraamam*') is set up. It stands on 4 acres of land inside Kumbalangi. It showcases the traditional fish equipment and handicrafts of this region. Kumbalangi Project seeks to save its magnificent culture, traditional occupation such as Crab Farming ('*Njandu Krishi*'), different methods of fishing, production of coir and so on. Kumbalangi was once the centre for the production of '*Vykom Coir*'. This village seeks to become more eco-friendly – as part of the eco-initiative of the Kerala tourism called '*Eco-Kerala*'. The beauty Kumalangi is that all the works done here are environment friendly.

Kumbalangi is the first village in Kerala to have its own waste management system and it has got about 600 biogas plants. Another important contribution of the village is home stay for tourist. In simple terms, a home stay is a home away from home. A home stay ensures a comfortable stay that is adventurous, delicious and above all economical too. The Panchayat is implementing the project in tie up with the Kerala Government. The state government has invested Rs 75 lakh to develop the roads of Kumbalangi. The Ministry of Tourism of the Government of India has helped the Tourism Department of Kerala state with a financial assistance of Rs 50 lakh to initiate the setting up of the Model Tourism Village of Kerala. Kumabalangi Panchayat is actively cooperating with this. To involve the rural people in developing tourism is the prime objective of this project, so that the local people can reap the socio-economic benefits through rise in their earnings and also more job opportunities from tourism.

IX. PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF KUMBALANGI RURAL TOURISM – ANALYSIS OF THE FEEDBACK FROM TOURIST

As already noted, the primary data are collected from a sample of 100 tourists randomly selected from among the tourists visiting Kumbalangi rural tourism destination. Profile of the sample tourists so selected for the study is shown in Table III. It may be noted that there is 70 per cent representation for domestic tourists and the rest 30 per cent represents foreign tourists visiting the spot. While there are 63 per cent male tourists, the balance 27 per cent constitutes female tourists. (Table III).

TABLE III: Profile of the Sample of Tourists Surveyed

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Domestic tourists	26	70.3	44	69.8	70	70
Foreign tourists	11	29.7	19	30.2	30	30
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Table IV shows the level of co-operation of the local people towards the tourists. None of the tourists has opined that the local people are not cooperative. While 54 percent of the tourists have felt that the local people are cooperative, 40 percent felt that they are very cooperative. Thus, totally 94 per cent of tourists have felt that the local people are co-operative to them.

TABLE IV: Response of the Sample Tourists regarding the Co-operation of the Local People

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Very Co-operative	16	43.3	24	38.1	40	40
Co-operative	21	56.7	33	52.4	54	54
No response	Nil	0	6	9.5	6	6
Not Co-operative	Nil	0	Nil	0	Nil	0
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Table V shows the level of dependence of the local people on Kumbalangi rural tourism project, from the perspective of the tourists. A total number of 68 tourists, comprising of 26 females and 42 males, believe that the livelihood of local people depends on tourism. But, 29 percent of total tourists comprising of 11 females and 18 males opined that livelihood of local people is not depending on tourism whereas 3 males expressed no opinion in this regard (Table V).

TABLE V: Whether Local People Seem to Depend on Tourism for their Livelihood? – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Yes	26	70.2	42	66.7	68	68
No	11	29.8	18	28.5	29	29
No response	Nil	0	3	4.8	3	3
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Regarding the accommodation facilities 51 percent of tourists, comprising of 22 females and 29 males, have expressed the view that accommodation facilities are good. It is noted that 32 per cent have opined these facilities as satisfactory, 7 per cent regarded these as excellent, and the rest 10 per cent tourists regarded the same as poor. Thus, it can be understood that the vast majority of the tourists are satisfied with accommodation facilities available at the Kumbalangi tourism destination. (Table VI).

TABLE VI: Adequacy and Quality of the Accommodation Facilities – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Excellent	Nil	0	7	11.1	7	7
Good	22	59.5	29	46.1	51	51
Satisfactory	11	29.8	21	33.4	32	32
Very poor	4	10.7	6	9.4	10	10
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

With respect to the reasonableness of the rent charged around 65 percent of the tourists surveyed, comprising of 23 females and 42 males, considered the same as moderate. In fact, 20 per cent of them have stated that the rate of rent is low. Only 15 percent of them comprising of 6 females and 9 males have regarded the rent structure as too high. (Table VII).

TABLE VII: Reasonableness of the Rent Charged – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Too high	6	16.2	9	14.3	15	15
Moderate	23	62.1	42	66.7	65	65
Low	8	21.4	12	19.0	20	20
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

It is noted that 20 per cent of the total of 100 tourists surveyed, comprising of 12 males and 8 females, have opined that the transportation facilities available at Kumbalangi tourism destination are good. But, as high as 60 per cent of them, 23 females and 37 males, have felt that these facilities need to be improved further. Besides, the rest 20 percent of the tourists have felt that transportation facilities at Kumbalangi are poor. In short, it may be noted for the vast majority of 80 per cent of the tourists the transportation facilities available at Kumbalangi are either poor or they need improvement. Hence, urgent initiatives are required from the part of the Government to provide adequate transportation facilities at this tourism destination so as to attract and retain the tourists and hence to enhance the tourism competitiveness of this rural tourism destination. (Table VIII).

TABLE VIII: Adequacy of the Transportation Facilities – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Good	8	21.7	12	19.0	20	20
To be improved	23	62.1	37	58.7	60	60
Very poor	6	16.2	14	22.3	20	20
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Regarding the communication facilities available at Kumbalangi rural tourism destination, as high as 61 per cent of the tourists comprising of 36 male tourists and 25 female tourists have opined that such facilities are sufficient. For another 7 tourists comprising of 4 males and 3 males, communication facilities are good also, not just sufficient. But, 30 tourists have felt that such facilities are insufficient while 2 tourists have not responded. Thus, for the majority of 68 per cent of the tourists communication facilities are either sufficient or good. Still, there is enough scope for some more improvement as 30 per cent or more have expressed inadequacy in these facilities. (Table IX).

TABLE IX: Adequacy of the Communication Facilities – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Good	3	8.1	4	6.3	7	7
Sufficient	25	67.5	36	57.2	61	61
Not sufficient	9	24.4	21	33.4	30	30
No response	Nil	0	2	3.1	2	2
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

The tourists surveyed have listed a number of things that they feel have impressed them the most during their stay at Kumbalangi tourism destination. (Table X). As high as 52 percent of the tourists comprising of 33 males and 19 females have opined that natural beauty is the most impressive tourism experience they had at Kumbalangi. For 20 per cent of them, hospitality is the most impressive thing that they have experienced. Culture is considered as the most impressive thing by 13 per cent of the tourists, while literacy of the local people has impressed 6 percent of the tourists. Only a small proportion of 3 per cent of the tourists have opined that cleanliness as the most impressive thing. (Table X).

TABLE X: Most Impressive Things Observed at Kumablanagi Rural Tourism Destination – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
No response	3	8.1	3	4.8	6	6
Cleanliness	Nil	0	3	4.8	3	3
Culture	5	13.5	8	12.7	13	13
Hospitality	8	21.7	12	19.0	20	20
Literacy	2	5.4	4	6.3	6	6
Natural beauty	19	51.3	33	52.4	52	52
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

It is noted that the general assessment of trip to Kumbalangi by the tourists surveyed have revealed that 38 percent of them, comprising of 12 females and 26 males, have been very satisfied by the trip. For as high as 59 per cent of the tourists, comprising of 25 females and 34 males, the trip has been satisfactory. Only the rest 3 tourists, all being male tourists, have opined that the trip has not been satisfactory. (Table XI).

TABLE XI: General Assessment of the Present Tour to Kumbalangi Rural Tourism Destination – Response of the Tourists

Particulars	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Highly satisfactory	12	32.5	26	41.3	38	38
Satisfactory	25	67.5	34	53.9	59	59
Not satisfactory	Nil	0	3	4.8	3	3
Total	37	100	63	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Every tourist undertakes a tour based on the influence of many factors. These influencing factors may vary from one tourist to another. This study is an attempt to find out the various factors that influenced the tourists while choosing a tour to Kumbalangi rural tourism destination. Table XII shows the major factors influencing tourists while making a tour to Kumbalangi.

TABLE XII: Factors that Influenced the Tourists while Choosing Kumbalangi Rural Tourism Destination – Response of the Tourists

Factors	Number of preference given by respondents						Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	
Service and safety	28	23	20	13	12	4	100
Infrastructure	8	5	19	20	23	25	100
Cost effectiveness	9	16	19	16	21	19	100
Natural beauty	37	26	15	10	10	2	100
Basic needs	16	16	20	23	15	10	100
Overall satisfaction	9	14	12	17	20	28	100
Garrett Table value	77	63	54	46	37	23	

Source: Field Survey

To assess the relative significance of factors influencing the respondents while choosing for a tour, Garrett ranking technique is used. Accordingly, the respondents are asked to assign the rank for all the factors and results of such ranking are then converted into score values using the formula: Percent position = $100 (R_{ij}-0.5) / N_j$ where, R_{ij} = rank given for the i^{th} factor by the j^{th} respondent and N_j = number of factors ranked by the j^{th} respondents. The percentage position of each rank was converted into scores using Garrett's Table. For each factor the scores of each individual are added and then mean value is found. (Table XIII).

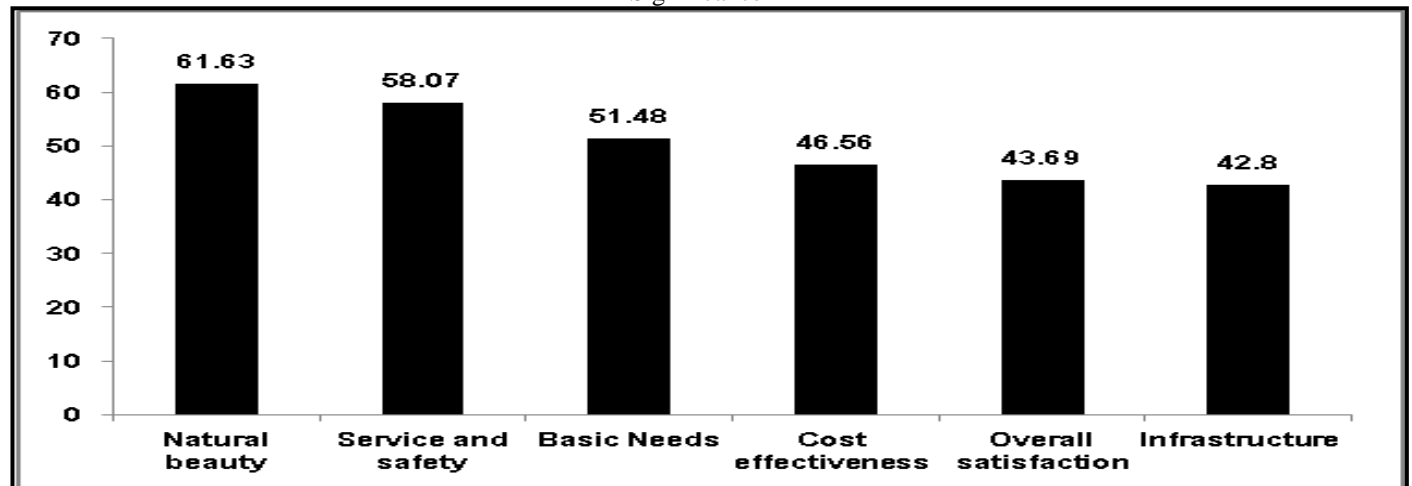
TABLE XIII: Factors Influencing the Tourists while Choosing Kumbalangi Rural Tourism Destination – Garret Ranking

Factors	Number of preference						Garret score	Average	Garret Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
Service and safety	2156	1449	1080	598	432	92	5807	58.07	II
Infrastructure	616	315	1026	920	828	575	4280	42.8	VI
Cost effectiveness	693	1008	1026	736	756	437	4656	46.56	IV
Natural beauty	2849	1638	810	460	360	46	6163	61.63	I
Basic needs	1232	1008	1080	1058	540	230	5148	51.48	III
Overall satisfaction	693	882	648	782	720	644	4369	43.69	V

Source: Based on Field Survey data shown in Table XII

Table XIII shows Garrett ranking and scores. Garrett scores help to assess relative importance of the various influencing factors based on which the respondents have made their decision on tourism destination (here, Kumbalangi). Table XII shows that the highest score is 61.63, and correspondingly first rank (most important factor) is Natural beauty. Going by this procedure, the second rank goes to Service and safety (58.07) and so on. The lowest (sixth) rank (42.8) corresponds to Infrastructure. (Figure II).

FIGURE II: Factors Influencing the Tourists while Choosing Kumbalangi Rural Tourism Destination – Descending order of Significance



Source: Based on the computed data shown in Table XIII, arranged in descending order

X. SCOPE FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study coupled with the previous two studies of the author viz. Manoj P K. (2015) [19] and Manoj P K. (2016) [20] together have addressed the issues like (i) employment prospects of rural tourism, (ii) governmental initiatives required, (iii) problems faced by the tourists / their expectations regarding various facilities and services in tourism spots, (iv) degradation to the environment, (v) inconveniences to the local community, (vi) factors influencing the tourists while choosing their tourism spot and the relative significance of these factors etc. Almost all major aspects, both from the perspectives of the local community and as well as the tourists, are covered in these three studies. Also, some strategies are suggested for better performance of tourism. But, aspects like budgetary support obtained (or awaited) for rural tourism in Kerala, progress of earlier schemes (if any), progress of similar rural tourism schemes elsewhere in India (eg. those in neighboring states like Tamil Nadu) etc. may be studied further.

XI. SUMMARY OF FINDING SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In view of the foregoing discussions, the major findings of the study and the respective suggestions are given below (Table XIV):

TABLE XIV: Major Findings of the Study and the Corresponding Suggestions

Major findings of the study (in the order of significance)	Suggestions made / Strategic options available
(i) Natural beauty is the most important factor (most impressive thing). Gradually degradation of natural environment is the worst challenge. (ii) Service and safety (hospitality) is the second most important factor. (iii) Infrastructure, per se, is not a major issue for the tourists (like, communication facilities etc.); but basic facilities must be provided. (iv) Very few tourists are impressed by the cleanliness (only 3 per cent) at the tourism destination. (v) Tourists are greatly attracted by the culture of the local people and that too in the natural surroundings.	(1) Conservation of the nature is of paramount significance. As tourists are drawn by natural beauty, maximum attention on preserving natural environment and ensuring cleanliness. Adverse effects of tourism on the nature must be minimized (2) Good service and safety (hospitality) is vital, particularly through ICT-integrated services. (3) Culture of the local rural people must be preserved; the same along with natural beauty attract tourists.
(vi) Transportation facilities are not adequate, these need to be improved. Poor status of transportation facilities is a major limitation of this destination. (vii) Communication / other infrastructure facilities are generally good; though greater internet connectivity; ICT-based services (online bookings etc.) are preferred by many, particularly the foreign tourists.	(4) Urgent steps are required to improve transportation facilities. Better bus service, boat service, road lines etc. should be arranged. (5) Better ICT infrastructure and modern facilities should be provided for higher competitiveness.
(viii) Basic needs need to be fulfilled; so basic facilities must be arranged. (ix) Cost effectiveness of the services need to be ensured for all services. (x) Better quality of service (including hospitality), safety and security, greater convenience in reservation (e.g. online bookings) etc. are expected by the tourists, particularly the foreign tourists.	(6) Tourists must be provided the basic facilities and cost-effective delivery of services. (7) ICT should be meaningfully integrated with all types of tourism services, both for enhanced quality and cost competitiveness.
(xi) The growth patterns in respect of foreign tourist arrivals to India as a whole and Kerala in particular over the period 2008 to 2014 have been markedly better than the average global trend in this regard; (xii) Between India and Kerala the foreign tourist arrivals are quite comparable, though the case of India is relatively better; and (xiii) There is no declining trend in the percentage share foreign tourist arrivals to Kerala vis-à-vis India; there is a slowly growing trend.	(8) The present growth pattern in tourism needs to be further improved though there is no declining trend in the long term, because there is consistent decline in foreign tourist arrivals over the last two years. Rural tourism deserves special attention, and so special budgetary support for its promotion must be sought by the state from the Union Government.

Source: Based on the analysis of data (Tables I to XIII) and personal discussions with the tourists during the field survey.

It is noted that besides the obvious benefits to the members of the local community as observed by Manoj P K (2016) [20], the tourists themselves are benefitted from rural tourism. But, in both these cases, the respective stakeholders need the natural environment to be preserved well, because otherwise the attractiveness of the location and hence its competitiveness may be adversely affected. To prevent degradation of the natural environment, for mitigating the environmental harm and preserving the environmental quality, utmost care is required for effective waste disposal, control of water, air and noise pollution, etc. It may further be pointed out that deliberate efforts are essential from the part of the Government for better promotion of rural tourism. Effective use of central (Government of India) budget support for improving the rural tourism infrastructure, proper showcasing of the local customs, practices, cuisines, fairs and festivals etc. of this tourism destination, including promotion of various traditional tourism products are of paramount significance for the tourism department of the Government of Kerala. Emerging models for faster infrastructural development like the PPP (Public Private Partnership) model must be meaningfully used by the Government of Kerala, following successful PPP initiatives by other state governments elsewhere in the country.

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