

Impacts of Ecotourism in Kodaikanal

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Abstract

Ecotourism is led by motives like spirit of enquiry, love of beauty, search for knowledge and respect for nature. It aims at quality tourism which creates minimal damage to the natural, social and cultural environment. The Ecotourism Society says that nature travelers must contribute to sustainable future for the destinations they visit. They are expected to make donation to conservation projects, contribute time to reforestation and participate in conservation projects. Appropriate local management and skill can satisfy both the visitor and local community. Hence, this article has paid attention to the impacts of ecotourism in Kodaikanal.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Environmental, Sustainable, Conservation, Development.

Introduction

Ecotourism has the potential to alleviate some of the pressures and problems of mass tourism, which include environmental stress, economic dependency and social disruption. Economically, ecotourism is expected to generate foreign exchange as well as revenue from domestic visitors. In Kodaikanal, it is observed that there is a positive impact of ecotourism to generate revenue and help to redistribute income to local residents and to create other indirect benefits within local areas. Ecotourism has a high potential for expansion, as the amount expended by ecotourists is generally greater than that of average tourists in Kodaikanal. It is further inferred during the survey that it also creates employment opportunities to local people. In addition to an economic impact, ecotourism has a corresponding social and cultural effect which is important for the marketer to understand. It is understood that education and income levels were higher for local residents of Kodaikanal and were influenced by ecotourism. In Kodaikanal, so many good public schools and colleges have been popularized. For example, Kodai International School and the like.

Ecotourism has been able to capitalize on this growing environmentally – friendly sentiment. It is inferred that ecotourism has had a positive impact on the environment. In Kodaikanal, environmental law has been enforced to protect environment in this area. For example the seven floor hotel at Kodai, “Pleasant Stay” case became popular and only recently people and most of the authorities

realized the impact on environment. Demobilising order was issued in the year 1996.

Despite the positive environmental intentions associated with most ecotourism ventures, some negative environmental fallouts do occur. For example, the tourist arrival at Kodaikanal has been increasing year after year. The tourist traffic has been doubling in 10 years which is far beyond the capacity of the Kodai town. Such overcrowding at Kodai leads to serious health problems and environmental hazards, unauthorized multistoried buildings have mushroomed. Another important factor is tourist vehicles which is a major impact on Kodai environment. Kodai town suffers as a result of the increased volume of cars, taxis and the accompanying air and noise pollution.

Objectives

The specific objective of the study are

1. To examine the impact of Ecotourism in Kodaikanal
2. To offer suitable suggestions based on the findings of the study.

Methodology

This section makes an attempt to analyse the opinion of the tourists regarding environment, irritants and promoters and hotel facilities. The link between tourism and environment has widely been accepted. The development of tourism is inevitable followed by externalities, both positive and negative. Environment pollution is one of the major negative externalities. The quality of water, air and the amount and diversity of vegetation and wild life have yet another type of influence. Ecotourism largely depends on the existence of clean environment. The present study has made an attempt to show how far the natural environment is clean from the perspective of tourists. For this, tourists were asked to mark the degree of pollution that they felt by using a five-point rating scale.

1. Much polluted
2. Polluted
3. No opinion
4. Not much polluted
5. Not at all polluted

Those answering (4) and (5) are taken as satisfied with clean environment.

Irritants and Promoters

The attitude of the local residents and the experience of the tourists also from part of the environment. A list of items were given in the schedule to study how far the existence of these irritate tourists or can work as promoting factors. The items were classified under two-heads – irritants and promoters. Table 1 shows the percentage-wise distribution of tourists who feel irritated on various items.

Table 1 percentage – wise Distribution of both the Tourists Who feel irritated About Various Items

Sl.No	Irritants	Expenditure	
		Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists
1.	Unclean public places	49	55
2.	Poor roads	58	42
3	Lack of signboards	34	37
4.	Lack of manners of drivers	39	36

5.	Beggars	28	35
6.	Cheating in shops	45	31
7.	Impure drinking water	31	24
8.	Misguidance	18	21
9.	Lack of entertainments	21	19

Source: Estimate Based on Primary data.

It is clearly revealed from the above Table 1 that out of the nine items given under the caption irritants in the case of domestic tourists, poor roads annoy 58 per cent followed by unclean public places (49 per cent). It is evident that foreign tourists are not irritated by the cheating in shops and impure drinking water.

In the case of foreign tourists, out of nine items given under the caption 'irritants', unclean public places annoy 55 per cent, followed by poor roads (42 per cent). It is evident that tourists are most irritated by lack of signboards and lack of civilized behavior among drivers.

It is also a fact that tourists are exasperated by the existing insufferable hygiene conditions and traffic bottlenecks. To provide a clean environment, steps may be taken to keep public places clean and also provide good roads and traffic facilities. By creating public awareness on hygiene, public places can be kept much cleaner. India, well known as the land of charity, should adopt measures to rehabilitate the beggars. The residents especially the shop owners should be made aware that the tourists are our guests and they must be given a fair treatment at the destination.

Among those items for which positive response has been given, accommodation ranks first followed by customs and tradition.

Table 2 Percentage-Wise Distribution of Tourist Based on Positive Response

Sl.No	Item	Tourists (%)	
		Domestic	Foreign
1.	Accommodation	71	80
2.	Customs and Tradition	69	75
3.	Food	65	72
4.	Literacy	62	66
5.	Transport	58	54
6.	Communication	54	44
7.	Hygiene	36	23

Source: Estimate Based on Primary data.

Generally, it is believed that one of the major constraints in the field of tourism development in the State is lack of adequate accommodation facilities. The study shows that 80 per cent and 71 per cent domestic and foreign tourists respectively are satisfied with the available accommodation facility. This can be cross checked with the accommodation availed of by tourists. In fact, the demand for luxury model resort houses and cheap paying guest system is a testimony to the liking of eco-friendly habitat. Generally tourists have been found to be satisfied with the available accommodation in Kodaikanal. Considering the response on neatness at public places and hygiene situation in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively, Kodaikanal has to make earnest efforts to improve public health facilities.

Considering the profile/likings of domestic tourists as well as foreign tourists and the ecological and environmental scenario, Kodaikanal has no other option but to concentrate on ecotourism.

Summary of Findings

Percentage wise distribution of the tourists who feel irritated shows that out of nine items given under the caption irritants in the case of domestic tourists, poor roads annoy 58 per cent followed by unclean public places (49 per cent). As far as the foreign tourists are concerned, 'out of nine items given under the caption 'irritants' unclean public places annoy 55 per cent followed by poor roads (42 per cent). Generally, it is believed that one of the major constraints in the field of tourism development in the state is lack of adequate accommodation facilities. This analysis observed that 60 per cent and 71 per cent domestic and foreign tourists are satisfied with the available accommodation facility.

Suggestions

An Ecotourism Development Board may be constituted to oversee and monitor the tourism activities in Kodaikanal. By educating the guest and the host on the importance of public health conservation and cultural integrity, sustainable development can be ensured to a great extent. Non-Governmental Organizations may be encouraged to undertake this task. The NGOs can be guide and guardians of ecotourism in Kodaikanal. Kodaikanal should make earnest efforts to improve public health facilities.

Conclusion

The rich variety of natural attractions and eco based activities that are spread in Kodaikanal can be used for promoting Kodaikanal as an ecotourism destination round the year. As ecotourism is labour intensive and is practiced with local participation and the potential to develop in this front is also very high. Practicing ecotourism in its true sense demands more responsibility on the part of tour operator's guests and the hosts. As the local administrators have not made an earnest attempt at developing ecotourism, the researcher has conducted an expert study to evolve policy suggestions for ecotourism in Kodaikanal.

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