

Investigation of the causes of the growth of ecotourism and tourist attitude with special reference to Thenmala, Kollam District, Kerala, India

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has become a major component of Indian tourism. Ecotourism is an increasing form of the tourism industry and some serious studies have been carried out on the topic. The paper discusses the potential role of natural environment with its flora and fauna in the tourism sector with the growing importance of ecotourism. The study area selected was Thenmala Ecotourism, Kerala. Due to its evergreen lush forests and natural scenic beauty, Kerala is very famous among tourists. The paper aims to explore the causes of ecotourism growth and its potential in the tourism industry and tourist's attitude towards the destination and local community.

Keyword; Thenmala, Ecotourism, Kerala, Local Community, Flora and Fauna

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a completely new tourism approach. Ecotourism is a preserving journey to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural heritage of the environment, taking care not to damage the dignity of the ecosystem, while creating economic opportunities that support local people from the preservation and protection of natural resources.

It has been generally defined as an environmentally sustainable tourism. The idea of environmental sustainability supplants the ability of a given area to carry the environment. The particular ecotourism principle who guides the Ministry's initiatives is as follows:

- (A) The participation of the local community will contribute to the overall economic growth of the region.
- (b) The possible conflicts between the use of eco-tourism tools and the wellbeing of local residents should be recognized and efforts should be made to mitigate the same
- (c) The form and scale of growth of eco-tourism should be consistent with the local community's climate and socio-cultural characteristics, and
- (d) should be designed as part of the overall development strategy.

1.1. Thenmala: -

Ecotourism is not just a catchy phrase for visitors who are nature lover. In Kerala there are numerous ecotourism locations that lure visitors due to their serenity, spectacular scenery, natural beauty and stunning views of the hills and woodlands. It is tourism for delicate, pristine and relatively untouched natural areas. Kerala, one of India's most popular travel destinations, is named one of the world's ten paradises.

Thenmala, which lies at the Kollam-Shencottah road junction with Trivandrum-Shencottah Road, called as first planned ecotourism site of India. It boasts ten sites of ecotourism covering the main hills of the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Pathanamthitta. Thenmala means 'Honey Hill,' because this region produces good quality honey. The dense forest surrounding is famous for timber that is popular throughout the country. Its land is spotted with forests, tree plantations and rubber and has been selected among some of the world's leading eco-friendly projects by the World Tourism Organization.

Thenmala ecotourism is a treasure trove of activities situated 66 kms east of Kollam. We have protected you on all levels, from leisurely walks to boat rides to even outdoor sports such as rock climbing and mountain biking. The staff is well trained at all times to provide the appropriate assistance and information. Thenmala Dam visit are worth a visit welcomes tourist and its scenery is famous throughout the region. Leisure Zone swaying bridge is kid's favorite. The boardwalk, winding roads and garden of sculpture are all worth to spend night at. Specially made huts are popular attractions of Thenmala's dense and dark forests and is a great escape into a different world. There are some very pretty unique spots which can be observed when you visit to Thenmala. A tree nursery, The Nakshatravanam, considered holy to the 27 constellations, has visitors queuing outside to bring home a sapling of a tree of their own birth star. Travelling to the nearby Rehabilitation Center of Deer is worth as there are different deer species. When the population reaches optimum levels, they are released into the forest. A boat ride off a memorable trip to Thenmala in the majestic Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary. The outstanding fauna and flora on display is truly beautiful and will be carved forever in your memory.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

As is evident from the available literature on this topic, the vast development potential of tourism is well recognized around the world. This is particularly true with regard to ecotourism, as it gives additional impetus to preserve the quality of the environment and thus the ecological balance. The same applies to allied types of tourism such as responsible tourism, rural tourism, farm tourism, and so on. It is noted from the analysis of the existing literature on tourism that there has been a growing global focus on the adverse ecological and environmental impact of tourism. Environmental organizations have always supported and insisted that tourism which is sustainably managed supports conservation of nature (Rovinski and Baez 1992; Ceballos-Lascurain 1992; Boo 1990; Young and Wearinin 1992; Eber 1992; EAIPR 1992; Figgiss 1993; Snepenger and Lee 1992, Richardson 1993a, 1993b; Young 1992; Swanson 1992) should be described as ecotourism.

Governments have launched tourism for development needs worldwide, with a greater focus on environmental preservation. Since the mid-1980s, this pattern is very evident. The effects of tourism projects on society as a whole are also discussed from a socio-ecological point of view and the conceptual model proposed by Brundtland (1987) is used for the reason above. Globally, this framework is used to manage various crucial development issues related to tourism. "Ecotourism" (ecologically sustainable tourism) and its variants such as rural tourism and responsible tourism are rapidly gaining worldwide popularity. Norton G. (1987) believed that many people traveling to natural areas do so specifically to indulge in nature experience, irrespective of what they choose to do. Lane (1991) noted that such eco-tourism projects should aim to provide the local community with job-satisfying jobs without harming the environment. McNeely et. Al. (1992) and Brandon (1996) hope that tourism will instill in the villagers a sense of local pride and encourage or enhance cultural heritage. Manoj P K, (2010) in his paper aims to examine the current status of global Indian and Kerala tourism and its specific trends and patterns, with particular reference to the increasingly significant definition of ecotourism. The paper considered important global and Indian experiences, ever-growing environmental issues related to tourism, and above all the unique characteristics of Kerala tourism, socio-economic, geographic and such other characteristics. The study states that India in general and Kerala in particular have yet to exploit the full potential of tourism.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the attitude of visitors towards Thenmala
- To evaluate the future of Thenmala - Ecotourism.
- Analyze the attitude and behaviors of locals towards the tourists.
- Access the economic benefits for the location through ecotourism.

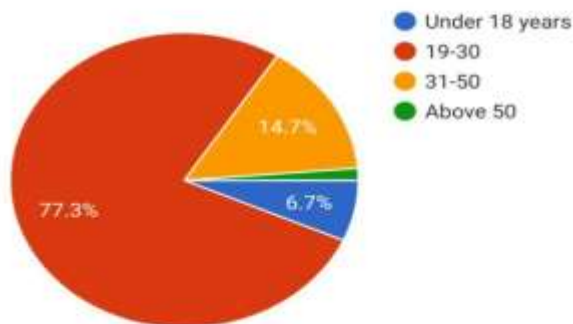
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out on the basis of the design of exploratory research. It is descriptive and exploratory by nature because it is used to characterize the actions and characteristics of the visitors of Thenmala Ecotourism and that destination's locals. The exploratory approach is chosen to achieve study goals and evaluate the response of ecotourism-related locals and tourists. The size of the test is 120. Tourists visiting Thenmala–Ecotourism will be the target respondents. The respondents were randomly selected to fill out the Thenmala-Ecotourism-related questionnaire in Kerala's Kollam district. The study's primary goal is to explore ecotourism development and to determine the ability of Thenmala to come out as a popular attraction in tourism industry.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

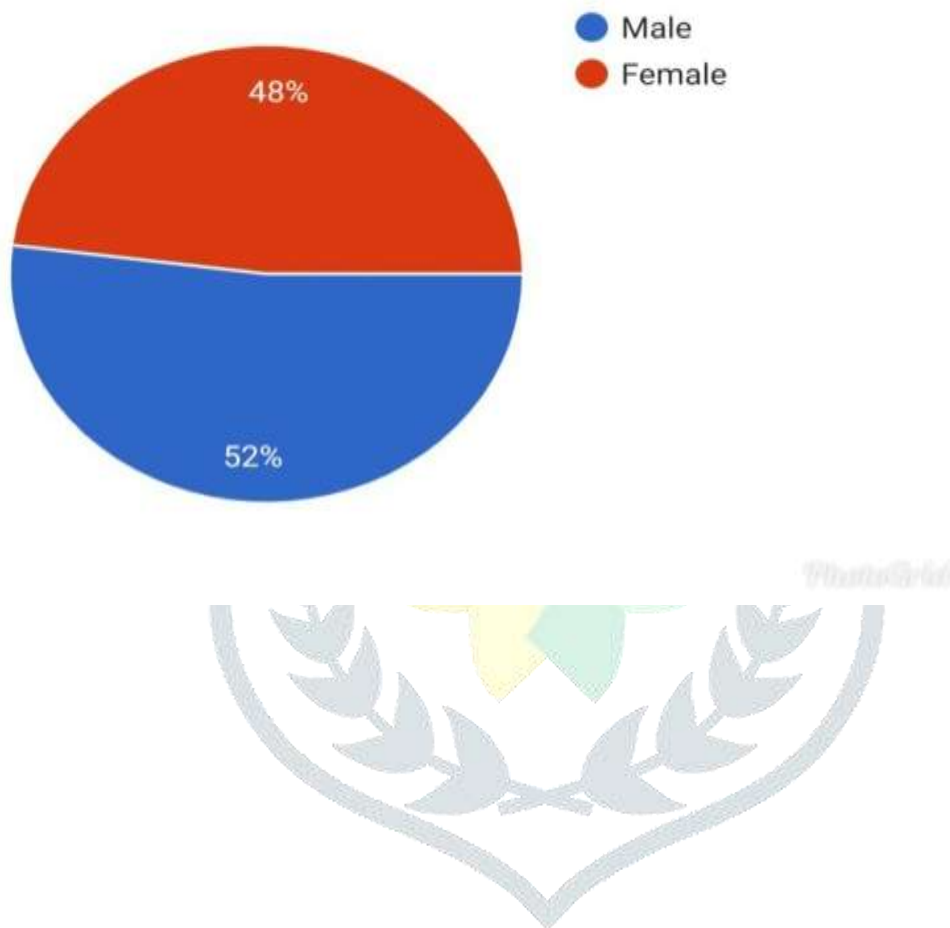
1. Age: Tourists have been categorized on the basis of their ages in many studies. Different age groups have different choices of destinations. As per the data collected the respondents visiting Thenmala were basically Youth with 77.3% ranging between 19 to 30 years. Almost 14.7% of respondents falls under age group of 31 to 50 years and only 6.7% of the respondents were under 18. This shows that mostly younger generation is directed towards ecotourism.

Age



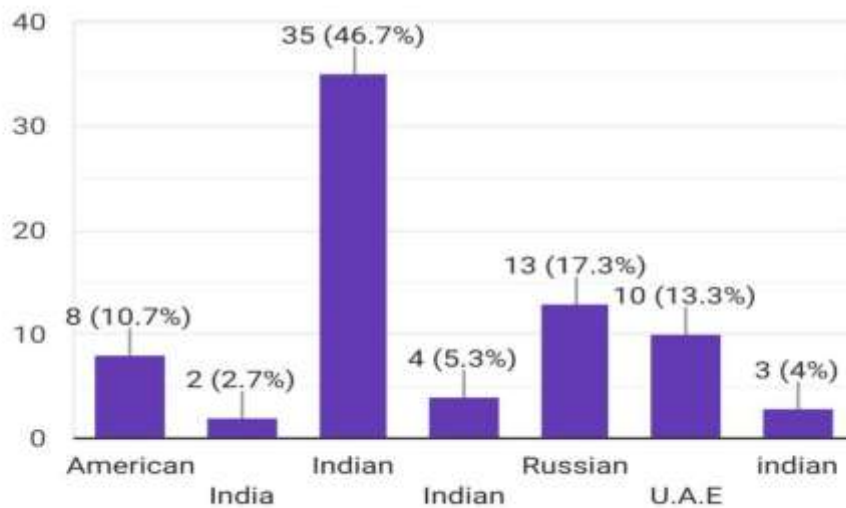
2. **Gender:** According to the gender of tourists, their choices of destinations also differs. As per the results of the questionnaire majority of the tourists were Male, 52% followed by females 48%.

Gender



3. Nationality: The majority of the tourists visiting Thenmala and filling this questionnaire were Indians, followed by Russians, UAE, Americans, Indian, and others.

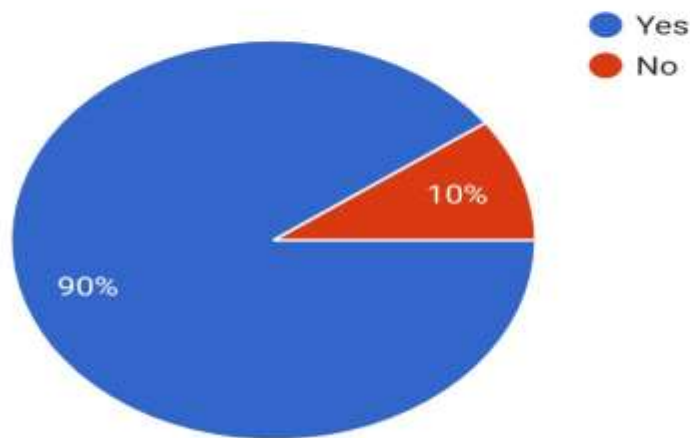
Nationality



4. Thenmala as a preferred choice of travellers in Kerala:From the results it can be summarized that majority of the tourists i.e. 90% think that Thenmala is the preferred by most of the ecotourists in Kerala and remaining 10% disagreed.

Is Thenmala ecotourism the most preferred form of ecotourism in Kerala?

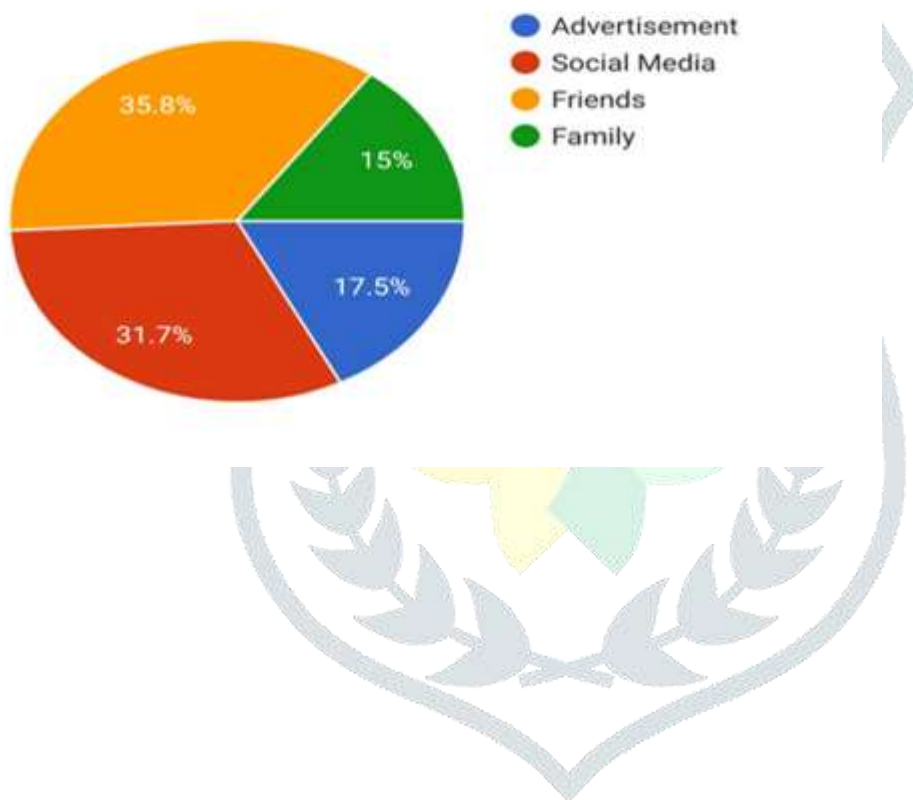
120 responses




5: Awareness about the destination: Next question was directed to the source of information which created awareness about Thenmala. As per results 35.8% and 31.7% of visitors learnt about the Thenmala by their social media accounts and friends respectively. 17.5% visitors got to know about this particular destination through advertisements and remaining 15% visitors were aware about Thenmala through their relatives and family.

How did you come to know about an ecotourism destination in Kerala?

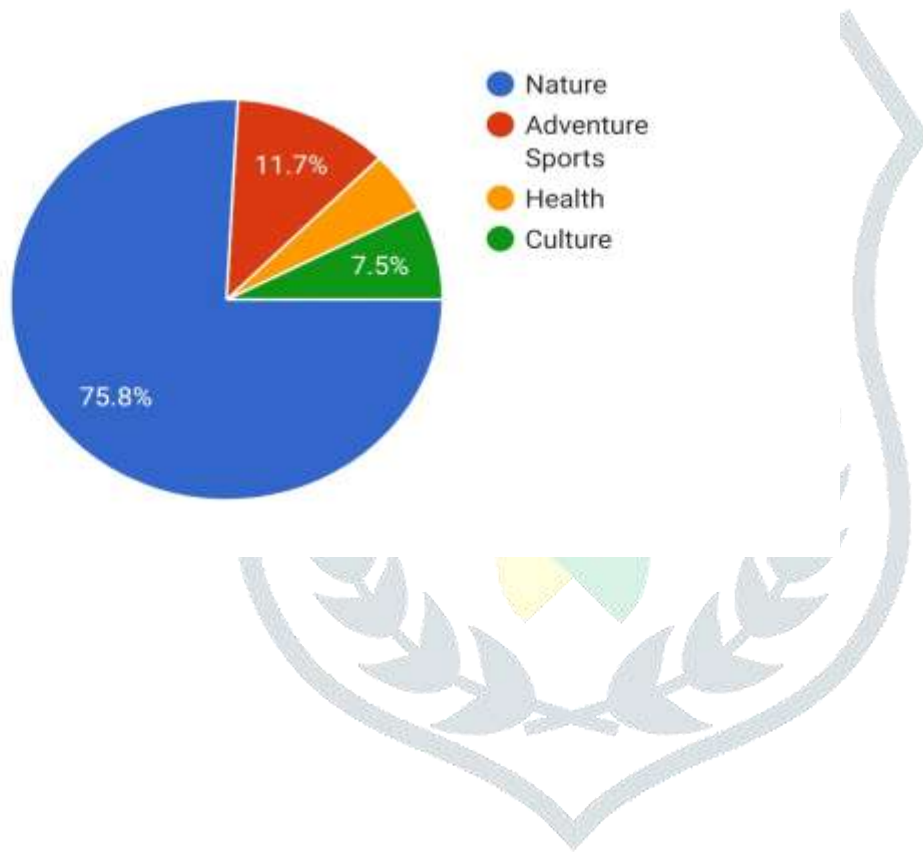
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6. Motivation: Everyone has somekind of motive of doing things. This question was designed to know the motivation of tourists to visit Thenmala. Many respondents i.e. 75 .8% visited there for nature, 11.7 % for adventure sports, 7.5 % for culture.

 **What attracted you the most towards Thenmala Ecotourism destination?**

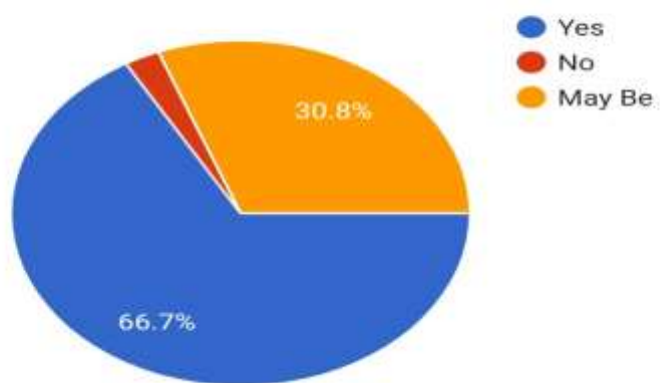
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7. Popularity: Next question was directed to know the view of visitors whether they agree or not that after establishing Thenmala as a ecotourism attraction the popularity of Kerala tourism has increased. Respondents majority of them i.e. 66.7% agreed to the statement that Thenmala is adding to the Kerala tourism’s popularity worldwide.30.8% visitors however were neutral about the fact.

 Do you think Thenmala Ecotourism is increasing the popularity of the destination leading to popularity of Kerala tourism?

120 responses

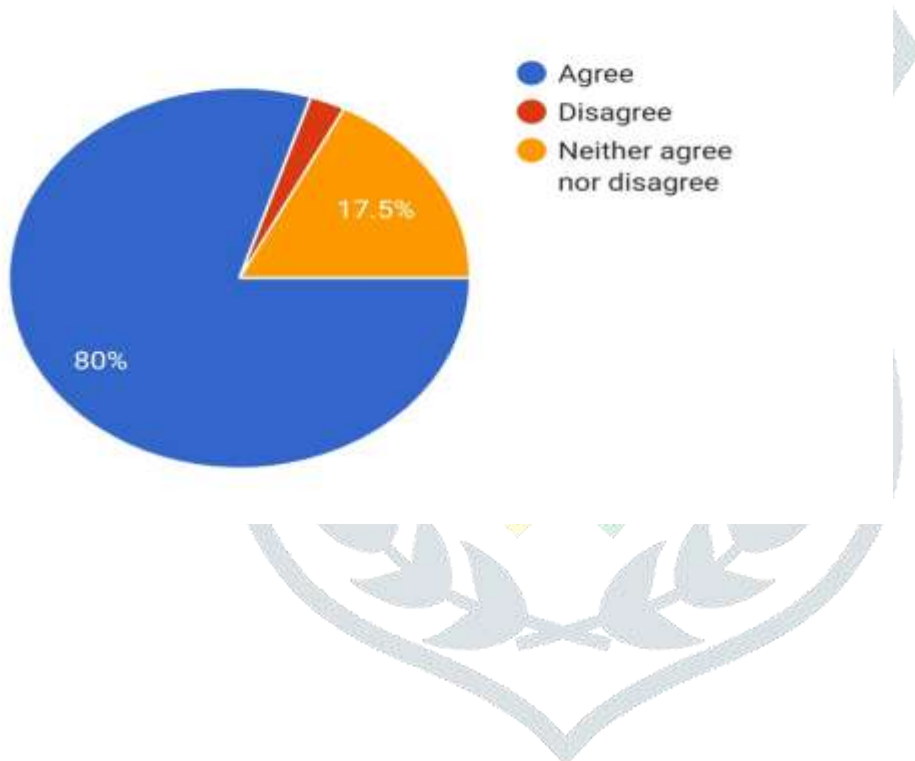


8. Contribution in improving living standards: Many respondents i.e. 80% of the total believe that Thenmala Ecotourism’s popularity has played a major role in improving the local community living standards surrounding it. Increased tourism has created job opportunities of the locals which in turn enhances their daily living. Rest 17.5% of visitors neither agree nor disagree.


 **Popularity of the destination has improved the living standards of the local community. Do you agree?**



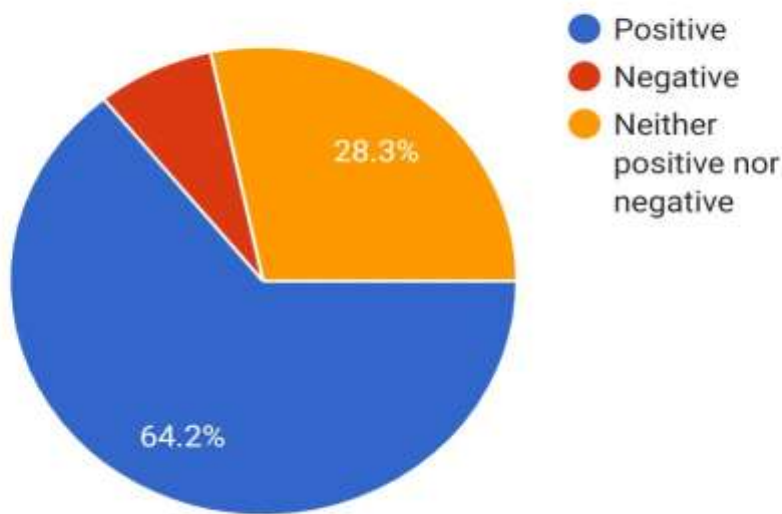
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9. Positive Impact: Every activity has positive or negative impact on the place. This question was designed to get tourists opinion that ecotourism is providing which kind of impact on flora and fauna. A significant number of respondents i.e. 64.2% think that ecotourism has a positive impact on the fauna and flora because it helps in preserving and conserving nature and 28.3% were neutral.

 What impact does ecotourism has on the flora and fauna of the destination?

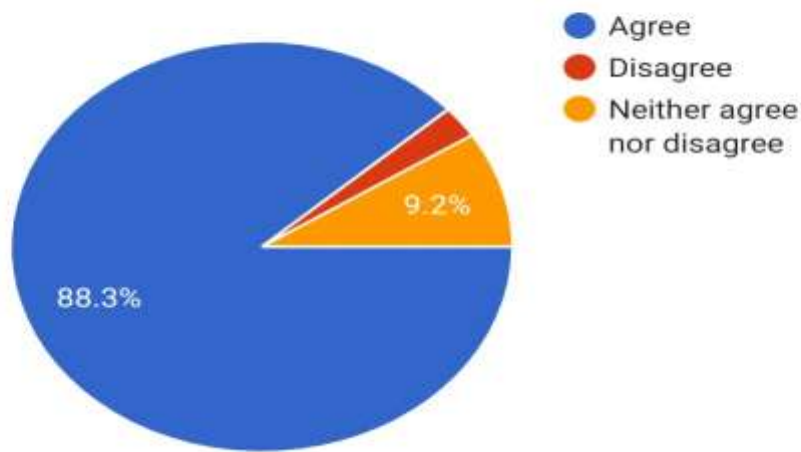
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10. Harmony with nature: As human and nature both are inseparable. The question was designed to get tourist opinion about the same. The results depict that the many respondents i.e. 88.3% think that ecotourism should be developed keeping in mind natural environment of the place and rest 9.2% were neutral about the statement.

 Ecotourism needs to be developed in harmony with the natural environment. Do you agree

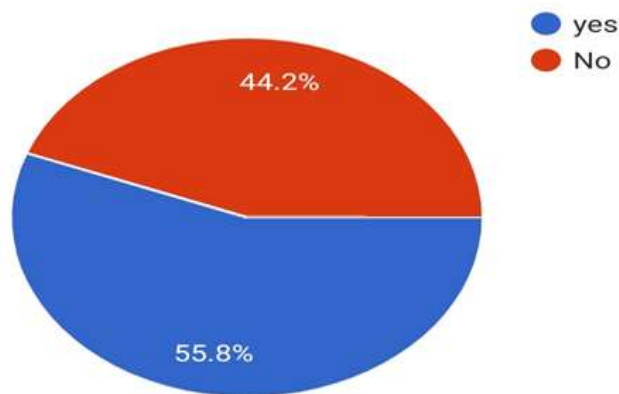
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11. Communicating with locals: The question was designed to know if tourist faced any kind of problem in communicating with local community. Result shows that 55.8% of the visitors faced problem in interacting with the locals because of the language barrier. Rest 44.2% did not face any kind of problem in interacting with locals.

 Do you face any difficulty while communicating with the local community of the destination?

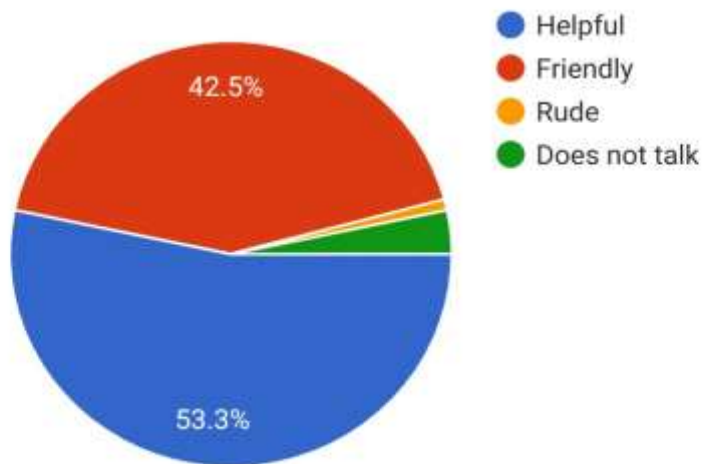
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12. Locals attitude towards tourists: The question was designed to get the idea about the local communities attitude and behaviour towards tourists. The results represent that behavior of locals towards tourist is warm and helpful (53.3%) and friendly (42.5%). A small portion of tourists said that they do not talk with them.

. What kind of behavior does the local community show towards you?

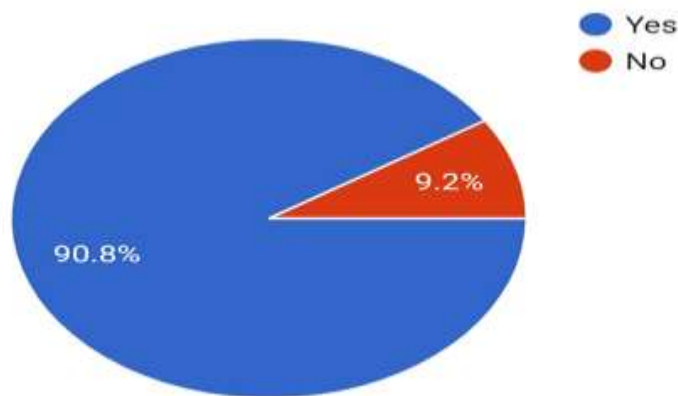
120 responses



13. Local Attitude & Tourist inflow:The question was designed to know the relation between locals attitude and tourist inflow. The result suggests that 90.8% of respondents agree to the fact that attitude of the locals can affect tourist inflow of a particular destination and only 9.2% do not agree with the fact.

 . Do you feel the attitude of the local community can affect a destination's tourist inflow?

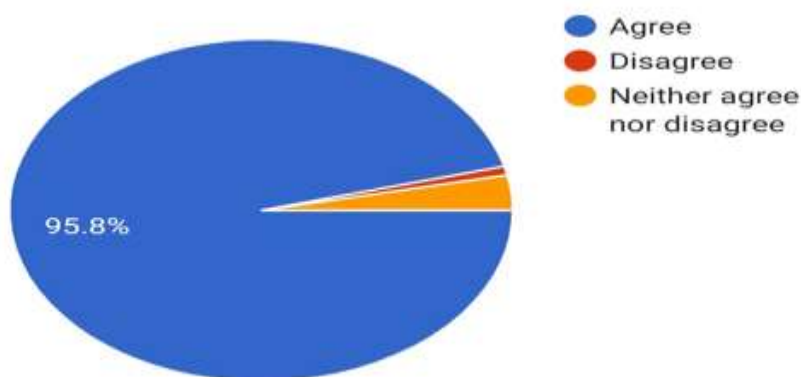
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14. **Maintenance of the site:** This question was directed to know the importance of maintaining the destination in its original natural state. Most of the respondents i.e. 95.8% believe that you can only attract tourist if you will manage destination in its original and natural state. A well-managed destination always attracts tourists.

 Do you believe that a well-managed destination, maintained in its natural state, is important for attracting the tourists?

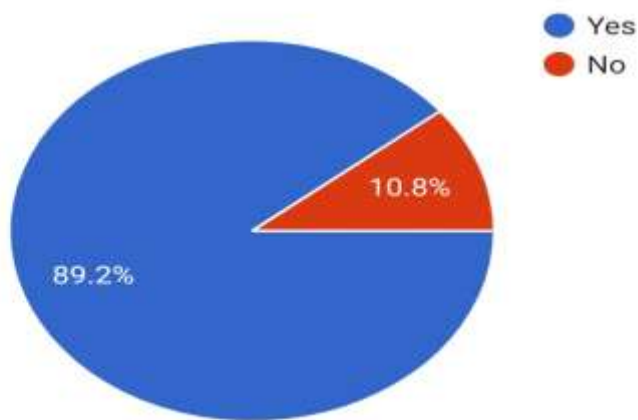
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15. Tourist & Environment: This question was designed to get the opinion of tourists whether they think that they help in preventing environment. Results show that 89.2% i.e. majority of the respondents believe that ecotourism shows concern towards nature and helps to prevent environment and culture and rest 10.8% were against this.

. Do you think ecotourism helps in preventing the environment?

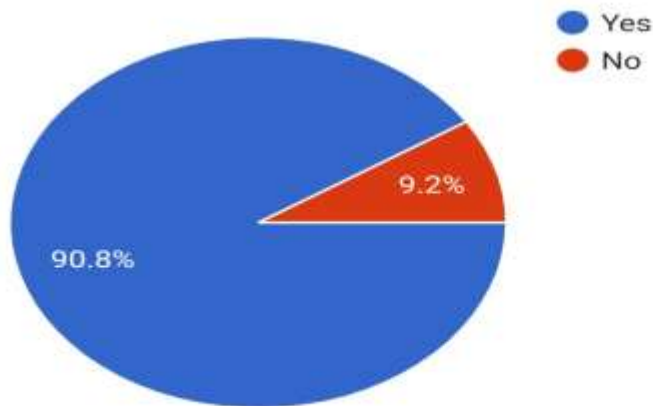
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16. Ecotourism & other form of tourism: This question was designed to know the opinion of tourists about role of ecotourism role in enhancing popularity of other forms of tourism. Many respondents i.e. 90.8% were positive and 9.2% has disagreed to the fact.

 Does ecotourism helps in increasing the popularity of all forms of tourism?

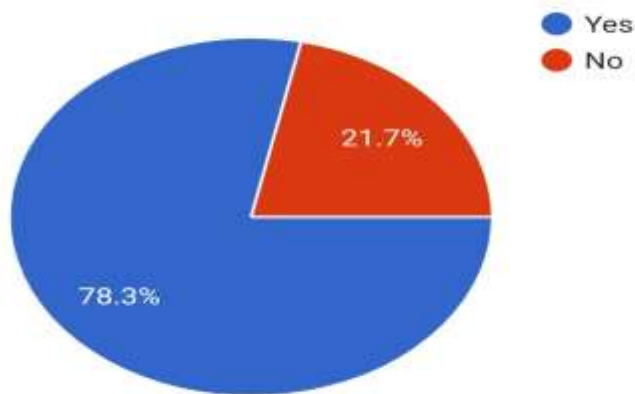
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17. Thenmala, a reason to visit Kerala: Thenmala one of the popular destinations can be reason of visiting Kerala for many tourists. This question was to get tourist opinion about same. Most of the respondents i.e. 78.3% think that Thenmala Ecotourism is quite popular motive to go Kerala. 21.7% disagreed to it.

. Thenmala ecotourism is one of the major reasons to visit the God's own Country Kerala.

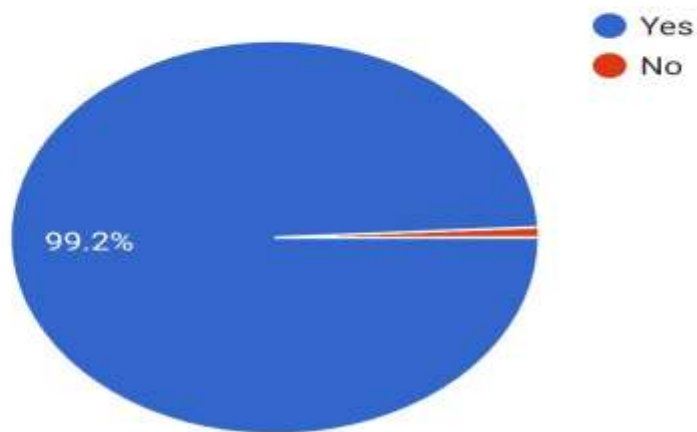
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18. Importance of conservation: This question was to know the opinion of tourists regarding conservation. Result show that almost all the 120 respondents i.e. 99.2% believe that conservation is important.

 Do you believe in the importance of conservation?

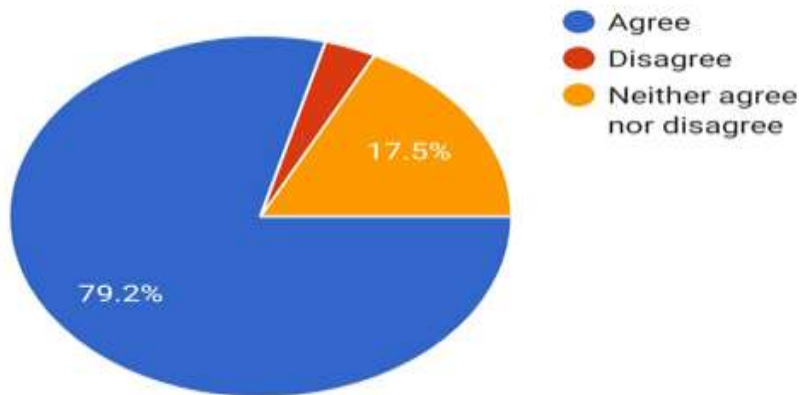
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19: Ecotourism & Conservation of Natural resources: This question was directed to know opinion of tourists regarding ecotourism and conservation of natural resources going hand in hand. Result shows that many respondents, i.e. 79.2 percent, agree that ecotourism and natural resource conservation can be compatible with each other and that only 17.5 percent do not agree or disagree with the statement.

 Do you think that Ecotourism and conservation of natural resources can be compatible?

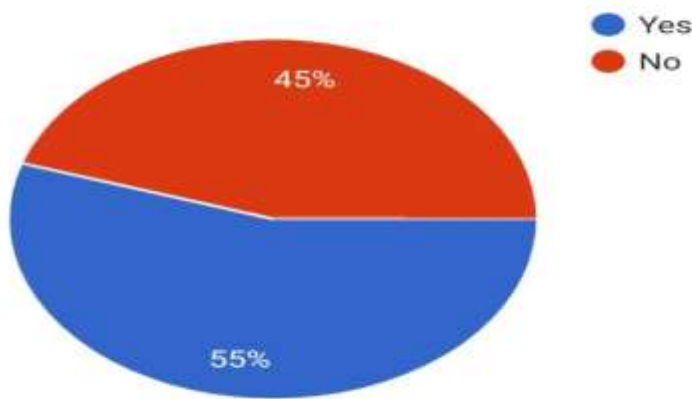
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20. Government & Ecotourism: Keeping in mind the popularity of ecotourism government should put proper efforts to promote ecotourism is sufficient. The result is that 55 percent of respondents feel that the government's efforts to prevent or encourage ecotourism are adequate, but 45 percent of respondents strongly oppose the statement.

 Do you think the efforts made by government to prevent or promote the ecotourism are sufficient?

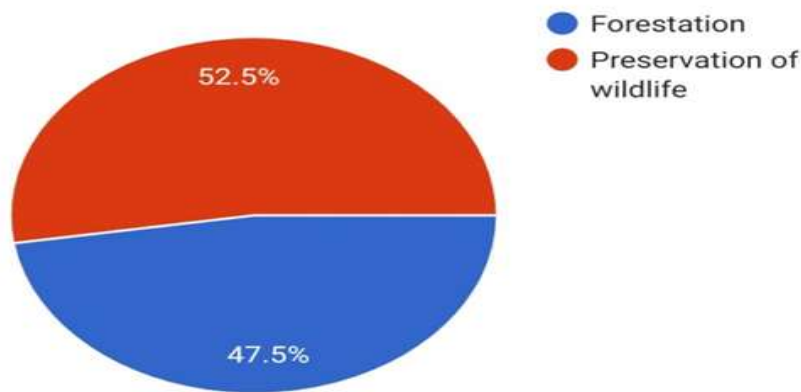
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21. Suggestions: Result shows that 52.5 percent of respondents feel that wildlife protection can be done to promote the destination of Thenmala Ecotourism, and 47.5 percent of respondents feel that forestation is critical for promoting the destination.

 What else can be done in order to promote the ecotourism destination like Thenmala?

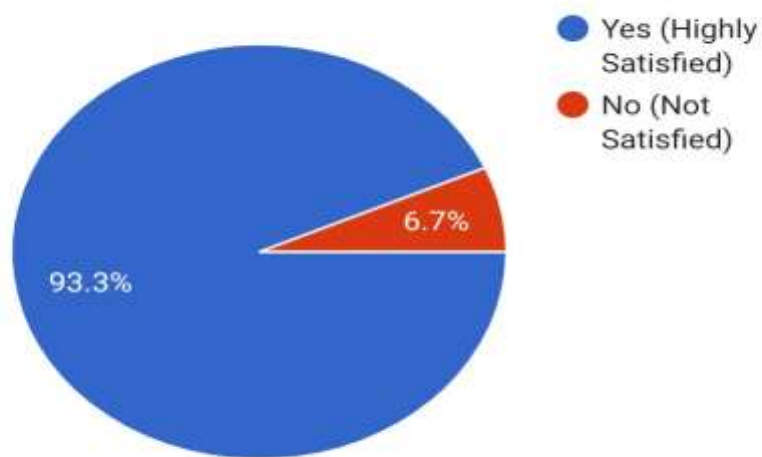
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22. Satisfaction: Result reflects that the majority of tourists out of 120 i.e. 93.3 percent are highly satisfied by visiting Thenmala Ecotourism Kerala. Just 6.7% were not content.

Did Thenmala ecotourism met your level of satisfaction?

120 responses



6. CONCLUSION

Recognizing the growth and importance of ecotourism in the tourism sector with special reference to Thenmala Ecotourism in Kerala was the primary objective of this research. Kerala is not only renowned for its various natural herbal remedies, but also for its "mesmerizing beauty." The objective of this study is to evaluate the potential it has to generate a high volume of tourists that will eventually help generate good income. Thenmala is a classic example of protecting the country's flora and fauna. This research will help bridge the gap between the theoretical and realistic approach to ecotourism. Knowledge about local's attitude towards tourists can also be obtained through this research. Most of the tourists visit Kerala because of Thenmala as they learn about the place mostly through friends and social media. Natural environment of Thenmala lures many tourists towards it and in turn there is a significant increase in the popularity of the state also. More and more tourists are contributing economy of the place. The increased economy and tourism are providing jobs and other help to the locals which has improved their living standards. The locals are helpful towards the tourists. Ecotourism affects its flora and fauna very well. All the visitors were very pleased with the ecotourism of Thenmala.

In harmony with culture and nature, ecotourism projects should be built. Many non-state or country-born tourists may face difficulties in communicating with local people. The destination must have access to a translator guide service. The mindset of the community determines a place's tourist influx. Therefore, it is the government's responsibility to encourage local people to communicate with tourists with positive intent and peace for the good of both the economy and the local community. Government should be attentive to the destination's well-being because to attract tourists to a destination it is necessary that it should be maintained in its natural state. Government must pay more attention to the prevention and development of the destinations for ecotourism. To order to encourage a destination such as Thenmala Ecotourism, wildlife preservation and forestation can be practiced. It is not only valued to pay attention to the visitor, but it will help to improve the destination's quality. If the tourists are happy, they will ask others to visit the place. Therefore, ecotourism provider must offer the best tourism service.

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