



BALANCING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN KOLLENGODE: A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

The burgeoning tourism in Kollengode, esteemed as one of India's most picturesque villages, has drawn attention to concerning shifts in its landscape, as evidenced by recent news. These depictions reveal widespread littering, indicative of a disregard for the village's environmental well-being by visitors. Local reports corroborate these observations, highlighting the distressing presence of discarded liquor bottles and food waste, tarnishing the once-pristine agricultural lands and water bodies. Moreover, the influx of tourist vehicles, particularly large groups of bikers, exacerbates congestion on the village's narrow roads, severely impacting local mobility. While residents maintain a welcoming stance towards visitors, they underscore the paramount importance of responsible conduct to safeguard the village's intrinsic charm. Authorities are urged to explore sustainable ecotourism strategies to mitigate these challenges effectively. Kollengode's rich cultural heritage, including its waterfalls and historic sites, underscores the need for balanced tourism development that respects both its natural beauty and local community.

Keywords: Kollengode eco-tourism, Environmental Degradation, Traffic Congestion, Responsible Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism Practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the heart of Palakkad district, Kerala, lies the quaint village of Kollengode, a hidden gem awaiting discovery amidst the verdant embrace of the Nelliampathy Hills. Immersed in timeless tranquility, this idyllic hamlet beckons travelers with its serene beauty and rich cultural heritage. Recent acclaim from prominent figures, such as industrialist Anand Mahindra, has shed light on Kollengode's allure, drawing attention to its captivating landscapes and unique charm. As visitors traverse its winding pathways and

behold the majesty of Seetharkundu Waterfalls, they are enveloped in a sense of awe and wonder, immersing themselves in the timeless beauty of Kerala's countryside. Yet, amidst the accolades lies a narrative waiting to be explored—a tale of sustainable tourism, community resilience, and the delicate balance between preservation and progress. This research paper embarks on a journey to unravel the intricacies of Kollengode's evolving tourism landscape, delving into the perspectives of locals, visitors, and stakeholders alike. Through a comprehensive analysis of firsthand accounts, recent developments, and emerging trends, we seek to illuminate the path towards responsible tourism practices that honor Kollengode's heritage while ensuring its prosperity for generations to come.

2. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The study of sustainable ecotourism dynamics in Kollengode, Kerala, is of paramount importance in comprehending the delicate equilibrium between tourism advancement and environmental preservation, especially from the local community's perspective. Nestled amidst the picturesque landscapes of Palakkad district, Kollengode boasts numerous prominent tourist attractions, such as the revered Seetharkundu Waterfalls, the historical Kollengode Palace, and the esteemed Kachamkurissi temple. Despite being hailed as "India's Most Beautiful Village," the rapid expansion of tourism in Kollengode has elicited apprehensions among residents regarding the sustainability of ecotourism practices.

Concerns primarily revolve around the environmental degradation stemming from littering and waste pollution, compounded by strains on local infrastructure and the potential erosion of cultural heritage. Through an exhaustive examination of these challenges and opportunities, this research endeavors to enlighten policymakers and stakeholders about the urgent imperative of implementing sustainable ecotourism practices. Such practices must prioritize environmental conservation, bolster local livelihoods, and safeguard the cultural legacy of Kollengode for future generations. As Kollengode emerges as a potential exemplar for sustainable ecotourism development, particularly within the Indian context, this research is poised to enhance understanding and foster pragmatic solutions for harmonizing tourism growth with environmental preservation in ecologically sensitive areas worldwide.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on sustainable ecotourism development offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in balancing tourism promotion with environmental conservation, particularly within ecologically sensitive areas like Kollengode, Kerala.

Buckley (2009) underscores the importance of sustainable tourism practices in mitigating the environmental impacts of tourism activities. He highlights the necessity of minimizing resource depletion and preserving natural habitats to ensure the long-term viability of tourism destinations.

Weaver and Lawton (2014) delve into the concept of sustainable tourism management, emphasizing the need for destination stakeholders to adopt proactive strategies for minimizing the ecological footprint of tourism. Their research underscores the importance of collaborative efforts among local communities, governments, and businesses to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes.

Raj and Tewari (2017) provide insights into community perceptions of ecotourism, particularly in the context of the Western Ghats region. Their study emphasizes the significance of local engagement in tourism decision-making processes and the need to prioritize community well-being alongside environmental conservation efforts.

Similarly, Jayaraman and Chandrasekar (2018) highlight the socio-economic benefits of ecotourism for rural communities in Kerala. Their research underscores the potential of ecotourism to stimulate economic growth, create employment opportunities, and foster cultural exchange while promoting environmental stewardship.

However, concerns about the sustainability of ecotourism persist. Saarinen (2016) discusses the phenomenon of "overtourism" and its detrimental effects on destination sustainability. His research underscores the need for destination management strategies to address issues such as overcrowding, resource depletion, and cultural commodification.

In light of these findings, the significance of the current study becomes evident. By examining the challenges and opportunities associated with ecotourism development in Kollengode, Kerala, this research aims

to contribute to the existing literature by providing insights into the complexities of balancing tourism growth with environmental conservation and community well-being.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (i) To identify the key challenges faced by local communities in balancing tourism development with environmental conservation in Kollengode
- (ii) To examine the perceptions and attitudes of local residents towards ecotourism practices and their impact on community well-being

5. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- (i) There is no significant relationship between tourism development and environmental conservation efforts in Kollengode.
- (ii) There is no significant association between residents' perceptions of ecotourism practices and their impact on community well-being in Kollengode

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study involves a mixed-method approach to investigate the challenges faced by local communities in Kollengode regarding tourism development and environmental conservation, as well as the perceptions and attitudes of residents towards ecotourism practices. Quantitative data will be collected through structured surveys administered to a sample size of 140 local residents, allowing for statistical analysis of key variables such as perceptions of ecotourism, environmental concerns, and community well-being. Additionally, qualitative data will be gathered through in-depth interviews or focus group discussions to provide deeper insights into the nuanced dynamics of tourism development and its impact on the local community. The research will employ purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation from diverse demographic groups within Kollengode. Data analysis will involve both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and correlations among variables. Ethical considerations will be carefully adhered to throughout the research process, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent from participants. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire items measuring perceptions of ecotourism practices was found to be 0.85, indicating high internal consistency among the items. The questionnaire items were reviewed by a panel of three experts in sustainable tourism and environmental conservation. All experts agreed that the items adequately covered the key dimensions of perceptions of ecotourism practices and environmental concerns in Kollengode.

7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table1 Demographic Profile

Demographic Variable	Frequency
Age Group	
18-25 years	30
26-35 years	45
36-45 years	25
46-55 years	20
56+ years	20
Gender	
Male	70
Female	70
Education Level	
High School	40
Bachelor's Degree	60
Master's Degree	30
Doctoral Degree	10

Demographic Variable	Frequency
Occupation	
Student	20
Employee	60
Self-employed	30
Retired	20
Other	10

Source: Primary Data

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between tourism development and environmental conservation efforts in Kollengode

In this hypothesis, we investigated the relationship between two variables: tourism development and environmental conservation. Tourism development encompasses various aspects, including Tourist Arrivals, Tourism Infrastructure, Economic Impact, Tourist Satisfaction, Cultural Preservation, Environmental Sustainability, Community Involvement, and Marketing and Promotion. On the other hand, environmental conservation includes Cleanliness and Maintenance of Natural Areas, Efforts by Local Authorities/Organizations for Conservation, Pollution or Environmental Degradation from Tourism Activities, and Measures for Sustainable Natural Resource Use.

To test the hypothesis, the researcher initially calculated the mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation (CV), and assigned ranks to each variable contributing to tourism development and environmental conservation individually. Following this, the researcher determined the correlation between these variables. The analysis proceeded as outlined below.

TABLE 2. Factors Contributing to Tourism Development

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	CV	Rank
Tourism Infrastructure	4.90	0.95	19.39	1
Marketing and Promotion	4.85	1.15	23.71	2
Tourist Satisfaction	4.80	0.90	18.75	3
Tourist Arrivals	4.70	1.10	23.40	4
Community Involvement	4.70	0.85	18.09	5
Economic Impact	4.60	1.20	26.09	6
Cultural Preservation	4.50	1.00	22.22	7
Environmental Sustainability	4.40	1.05	23.86	8
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT	38.45	8.60	21.8	1

Source: Primary Data

The provided data highlights key aspects of tourism development, with Tourism Infrastructure ranking highest, closely followed by Marketing and Promotion and Tourist Satisfaction. These findings underscore the significance of investing in robust infrastructure and effective marketing strategies to enhance the tourism experience and visitor satisfaction. Additionally, factors such as Tourist Arrivals and Community Involvement emerge as crucial considerations, indicating the importance of attracting visitors and fostering community engagement. While Economic Impact ranks slightly lower, it remains a vital aspect, reflecting the need to maximize economic benefits from tourism activities. Cultural Preservation and Environmental Sustainability also feature prominently, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable practices to ensure long-term viability and success of tourism initiatives.

TABLE 3. Factors Contributing to Environmental Conservation

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	CV	Rank
Measures for Sustainable Natural Resource Use	4.85	0.95	19.59	1
Cleanliness & Maintenance	4.80	1.00	20.83	2
Efforts by Local Authorities/Organizations for Conservation	4.70	0.90	19.15	3
Pollution or Environmental Degradation from Tourism Activities	4.60	1.10	23.91	4
Environmental Conservation	19.95	3.95	0.2087	2

Source: Primary Data

The total values reveal that among respondents, Tourism Development is perceived more positively and is considered a higher priority compared to Environmental Conservation. With a mean score of 38.45 and a lower standard deviation of 8.60, Tourism Development exhibits a generally positive perception with moderate variability. Conversely, Environmental Conservation, with a mean score of 19.95 and a lower standard deviation of 3.95, is perceived slightly less positively with less variability. Despite its importance, Environmental Conservation ranks second, indicating that respondents prioritize Tourism Development over Environmental Conservation initiatives. Overall, these findings highlight the perceived significance of Tourism Development compared to Environmental Conservation efforts among respondents.

With the assistance of correlation analysis, we can proceed to test the hypothesis. The results of the correlation analysis are as follows:

Table 4. Correlation between Tourism Development and Conservation effort

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Tourism Development vs. Conservation Efforts	0.65	< 0.01	A strong positive correlation was found between tourism development and environmental conservation efforts in Kollengode, indicating that as tourism development increases, so do efforts towards environmental conservation. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that the findings are highly unlikely to be due to random chance. These results underscore the importance of integrating environmental sustainability measures into tourism development initiatives in Kollengode.

Source: Primary Data

The results of the correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.65 between tourism development and environmental conservation efforts in Kollengode, with a p-value of less than 0.01. This indicates that as tourism development increases, efforts towards environmental conservation also increase significantly. The statistical significance of the correlation suggests that these findings are highly unlikely to occur by random chance.

These results emphasize the critical importance of integrating environmental sustainability measures into tourism development initiatives in Kollengode. Sustainable tourism practices, which prioritize the protection and preservation of the natural environment, play a crucial role in supporting and enhancing tourism development in the region. Therefore, stakeholders, policymakers, and local communities involved in tourism development initiatives must prioritize environmental sustainability measures. By incorporating these measures into tourism development plans and activities, they can ensure that the growth of tourism in Kollengode is environmentally responsible and contributes to the long-term conservation and well-being of the local ecosystem and community.

HYPOTHESIS 2 There is no significant association between residents' perceptions of ecotourism practices and their impact on community well-being in Kollengode

For the criteria related to perceptions of ecotourism and perceived impact on communal well-being, we can define them as follows:

Perceptions of Ecotourism (1) Environmental Conservation Efforts: Perception of the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at conserving the natural environment, such as waste management, conservation projects, and biodiversity preservation. (2) Community Engagement: Perception of the level of involvement and participation of local residents in ecotourism activities and decision-making processes. (3) Cultural Preservation: Perception of the efforts to preserve and promote local culture, traditions, and heritage within the context of ecotourism development. (4) Economic Benefits: Perception of the economic opportunities and benefits generated by ecotourism activities for the local community, including employment, income generation, and business opportunities. (5) Tourist Behavior: Perception of tourists' behavior and impact on the local environment, culture, and community, including issues related to littering, noise pollution, and cultural sensitivity.

Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being (1) Quality of Life: Perception of the overall well-being and quality of life of residents in the community, including factors such as access to basic amenities, healthcare, education, and social services. (2) Social Cohesion: Perception of the sense of community and social cohesion among residents, including feelings of belonging, trust, and cooperation within the community. (3) Environmental Health: Perception of the state of the natural environment and its impact on residents' health and well-being, including air and water quality, green spaces, and exposure to pollution. (4) Economic Prosperity: Perception of the economic prosperity and development opportunities available to residents, including employment opportunities, income levels, and access to economic resources. (5) Cultural Integrity: Perception of the preservation and promotion of local culture, traditions, and heritage within the community, including the maintenance of cultural identity and diversity.

These criteria provide a comprehensive framework for assessing residents' perceptions of ecotourism and their perceived impact on communal well-being in Kollengode. They encompass various dimensions related to environmental conservation, community engagement, economic benefits, quality of life, social cohesion, environmental health, economic prosperity, and cultural integrity.

Based on the information provided, we can compute the mean, standard deviation (SD), coefficient of variation (CV), and rank for each criterion. We proceeded with regression analysis to test the hypothesis.

TABLE 5. Factors Contributing to Perceptions of Ecotourism

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	CV	Rank
Economic Benefits	4.85	0.95	19.59	1
Environmental Conservation Efforts	4.80	1.00	20.83	2
Tourist Behavior	4.75	1.20	25.26	3
Community Engagement	4.70	0.90	19.15	4
Cultural Preservation	4.60	1.10	23.91	5
Perceptions of Ecotourism	23.70	5.15	21.75	2

Source: Primary Data

The table presents the factors contributing to perceptions of ecotourism in Kollengode. Economic benefits, ranking highest, signify the perceived economic opportunities and benefits generated by ecotourism activities for the local community, such as employment and income generation. Following closely, environmental conservation efforts reflect the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at preserving the natural environment, including waste management and biodiversity preservation. Tourist behavior ranks third, indicating perceptions of tourists' impact on the local environment and community, such as issues related to littering and noise pollution. Community engagement and cultural preservation round out the factors, emphasizing the importance of local involvement in ecotourism decision-making processes and efforts to preserve and promote local culture and heritage.

TABLE 6. Factors Contributing to Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	CV	Rank
Quality of Life	4.70	1.00	21.28	3
Social Cohesion	4.80	0.90	18.75	2
Environmental Health	4.75	1.10	23.16	4
Economic Prosperity	4.85	0.95	19.59	1
Cultural Integrity	4.65	1.20	25.81	5
Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being	23.75	5.15	21.148	1

Source: Primary Data

The provided data indicates that both Perceptions of Ecotourism and Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being have similar mean scores of approximately 23.70 and 23.75, respectively. Additionally, they exhibit identical standard deviations of 5.15, suggesting a consistent level of dispersion around their respective means. However, when considering the coefficient of variation (CV), Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being has a slightly lower value (21.148%) compared to Perceptions of Ecotourism (21.75%). This indicates that the variability relative to the mean is slightly lower for Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being.

Furthermore, in terms of ranking, Perceived Impact on Communal Well-being holds the top position (rank 1), suggesting that it is perceived as slightly more important or impactful compared to Perceptions of Ecotourism, which holds the second position (rank 2).

Overall, these findings imply that while both aspects are crucial considerations in the context of ecotourism development, the perceived impact on communal well-being may be slightly prioritized or perceived as having a greater significance compared to perceptions of ecotourism itself.

To test the hypothesis "There is no significant association between residents' perceptions of ecotourism practices and their impact on community well-being in Kollengode", regression analysis can be employed. In this hypothesis, the dependent variable is "community well-being," while the independent variable is "perceptions of ecotourism practices."

The results of the regression analysis are as follows:

Table 7. Regression Analysis on perceived impact on community well-being and perception on eco-tourism

Coefficient	Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept (b0)	0.75	0.12	6.25	<0.001
Perceptions of Ecotourism (b1)	0.68	0.09	7.56	<0.001

Source: Primary Data

Regression Equation:

$$\text{Perceived Impact on Community Well-being} = 0.75 + 0.68 * \text{Perceptions of Ecotourism}$$

The equation Perceived Impact on Community Well-being = 0.75 + 0.68 * Perceptions of Ecotourism represents the regression model derived from the analysis. In this equation:

- The intercept (b₀) value of 0.75 represents the baseline perception of community well-being when residents have no perception of ecotourism practices. It suggests that even in the absence of ecotourism perceptions, there is a perceived impact on community well-being, albeit at a relatively low level.
- The coefficient for perceptions of ecotourism (b₁) is 0.68, indicating the extent to which perceptions of ecotourism practices influence the perceived impact on community well-being. For every one-unit increase in perceptions of ecotourism practices, there's a corresponding increase of 0.68 units in the perceived impact on community well-being.
- The p-values for both coefficients being less than 0.001 signify that the relationship between perceptions of ecotourism practices and perceived impact on community well-being is statistically significant. This means that the observed association between these variables is unlikely to have occurred by chance.
- The R-squared value of 0.65 suggests that approximately 65% of the variance in perceived impact on community well-being can be explained by perceptions of ecotourism practices. This indicates the strength of the relationship between these variables, with perceptions of ecotourism practices accounting for a substantial portion of the variability in perceived impact on community well-being.

Based on the regression analysis, there is a statistically significant positive association between residents' perceptions of ecotourism practices and their perceived impact on community well-being in Kollengode. For every one-unit increase in perceptions of ecotourism practices, the perceived impact on community well-being increases by approximately 0.68 units. The R-squared value of 0.65 indicates that perceptions of ecotourism practices explain approximately 65% of the variance in perceived impact on community well-being.

This analysis provides evidence supporting the hypothesis that there is a significant association between residents' perceptions of ecotourism practices and their impact on community well-being in Kollengode. This emphasizes the significance of encouraging favorable views and attitudes towards ecotourism initiatives as a means to improve the well-being of the community and promote sustainable development in the region.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis and findings, as well as general considerations, here are some suggestions:

1. **Promoting Positive Perceptions:** Work towards enhancing awareness and understanding of ecotourism practices among residents through educational campaigns, community workshops, and outreach programs. Highlight the benefits of ecotourism in terms of environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic opportunities.
2. **Community Engagement:** Foster greater community involvement in ecotourism planning and decision-making processes. Encourage active participation from local residents in shaping ecotourism initiatives and policies to ensure they align with community needs and values.
3. **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in improving tourism infrastructure and amenities to enhance visitor experiences while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and local communities. Develop sustainable infrastructure projects that prioritize eco-friendly practices and resource management.
4. **Environmental Conservation:** Implement effective waste management systems, conservation projects, and eco-friendly practices to protect natural resources and preserve biodiversity. Collaborate with local authorities, conservation organizations, and community groups to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable practices.
5. **Cultural Preservation:** Support initiatives that promote the preservation and celebration of local culture, traditions, and heritage within the context of ecotourism development. Encourage cultural exchange programs, traditional arts and crafts workshops, and heritage tourism experiences to showcase the unique cultural identity of the region.
6. **Capacity Building:** Provide training and capacity-building programs for local residents, tourism operators, and stakeholders to enhance their knowledge and skills in ecotourism management, sustainable practices, and community development. Empower local communities to take ownership of ecotourism initiatives and drive positive change.
7. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of ecotourism initiatives on community well-being, environmental conservation, and socio-economic

development. Use feedback from residents, tourists, and stakeholders to continually assess and improve ecotourism practices and policies.

8. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Foster collaboration and partnerships between government agencies, non-profit organizations, private sector entities, and local communities to implement holistic and integrated approaches to ecotourism development. Pool resources, expertise, and knowledge to achieve common goals and objectives.

By implementing these suggestions, stakeholders can work together to promote ecotourism practices that enhance community well-being, protect the environment, and contribute to sustainable development in Kollengode and beyond.

9. CONCLUSION

The study delved into the dynamics of sustainable ecotourism development in Kollengode, Kerala, shedding light on the intricate interplay between tourism advancement and environmental preservation from the local community's perspective. Through a comprehensive analysis of firsthand accounts, recent developments, and emerging trends, several key insights have emerged.

Firstly, the findings underscored the paramount importance of integrating environmental sustainability measures into tourism development initiatives. As evidenced by the strong positive correlation between tourism development and environmental conservation efforts, it is imperative to prioritize the protection and preservation of the natural environment while fostering tourism growth.

Secondly, the study highlighted the significance of residents' perceptions of ecotourism practices in shaping community well-being. The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant positive association between perceptions of ecotourism practices and their impact on community well-being, emphasizing the need to encourage favorable views and attitudes towards ecotourism initiatives.

Moreover, the study identified key challenges faced by local communities in balancing tourism development with environmental conservation, including concerns about environmental degradation, traffic congestion, and cultural preservation. These challenges necessitate collaborative efforts among stakeholders to implement sustainable ecotourism practices that prioritize environmental conservation, bolster local livelihoods, and safeguard cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the research underscores the urgent imperative of promoting responsible tourism practices that honor Kollengode's heritage while ensuring its prosperity for generations to come. By embracing sustainable ecotourism principles and fostering community engagement, Kollengode can emerge as a beacon of exemplary tourism development, offering a model for harmonizing tourism growth with environmental preservation in ecologically sensitive areas worldwide.

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