



Exploring Awareness and Perception of tourists about Ecotourism with special reference to Kovalam Beach at Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala.

Mr. Kodappuli Balan Karappan¹, Dr. K. Kumuthadevi²

¹PhD Research Scholar in Commerce, KPR College of Arts, Science and Research, Coimbatore

²Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, KPR College of Arts, Science and Research Coimbatore

Abstract

The primary aim of this paper is to ascertain the level of awareness and experiential knowledge possessed by tourists regarding ecotourism destinations, as well as to evaluate the eco-friendly attitudes of tourists towards the ecotourism opportunities presented by Kovalam Beach. The sample for this investigation was confined to tourists visiting Kovalam Beach in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The findings of this study have meticulously identified fundamental issues pertaining to hospitality services, facilities, amenities, safety, and individualized care in relation to visitor awareness and experience. Ecotourism at Kovalam Beach has unfortunately resulted in certain adverse experiences for visitors, including concerns regarding cleanliness, waste management, tourist information assistance, and overall safety and security. Ultimately, the study indicates that the perception of tourists regarding the ecotourism destination reveals a significant level of awareness and contributes to an enriched experiential understanding.

Key words: Ecotourism, Awareness, Experience, Tourists

Introduction

Ecotourism, a form of tourism focused on responsible travel to natural areas, conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. Understanding tourist perceptions of ecotourism is crucial for the sustainable development of destinations like Kovalam Beach in Kerala, India. Ecotourism emphasizes minimal impact, environmental awareness, and respect for local cultures. Kovalam, with its picturesque beaches and rich cultural heritage, has the potential to attract ecotourists seeking authentic and responsible travel experiences. Responsible tourism plays a pivotal role in destination sustainability, which in turn impacts the quality of life. The ecotourism sector recognizes the importance of preserving natural resources, promoting biodiversity, and empowering local communities. It is imperative to gauge tourist perceptions of ecotourism to ensure its successful implementation and long-term sustainability in Kovalam.

Statement of the problem

Ecotourism has gained prominence as a sustainable approach to tourism, emphasizing environmental conservation and community engagement. However, the success of ecotourism destinations depends largely on tourists' awareness, experiences, and their attitudes toward eco-friendly practices. Kovalam Beach, a renowned ecotourism destination in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, faces challenges in maintaining sustainable tourism standards. Issues such as inadequate cleanliness, poor waste management, insufficient tourist information assistance, and concerns over safety and security have negatively impacted visitors' experiences. Additionally, the level of awareness among tourists regarding ecotourism principles and their eco-friendly attitudes remains unclear. This study seeks to examine these critical aspects by assessing tourists' awareness, experiential knowledge, and perceptions of Kovalam Beach as an ecotourism destination.

Objectives of the study:

1. To determine the level of awareness and perception of tourists about ecotourism at Kovalam Beach.
2. To assess the eco-friendly attitudes of tourists toward sustainable tourism practices at Kovalam Beach.

Review of Literature:

Balida, D. A. R. (2023) This study examined domestic tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward ecotourism, focusing on their awareness and willingness to engage in sustainable tourism practices. The research problem centered on understanding how domestic tourists view ecotourism and whether their attitudes align with conservation goals. Findings revealed that while many tourists were aware of ecotourism principles, their actual behaviors did not always reflect sustainable practices. The study concluded that targeted educational campaigns and policy interventions are needed to bridge the gap between awareness and action.

Li, T., Liu, F., & Soutar, G. N. (2024) This study explored the experiences and perceived value of ecotourism among Chinese outbound tourists. The research problem addressed the lack of understanding of how Chinese tourists evaluate ecotourism experiences. The objective was to identify key factors influencing their satisfaction. Findings indicated that authenticity, environmental education, and cultural interaction were highly valued. The study concluded that ecotourism providers should tailor experiences to meet the expectations of Chinese tourists to enhance satisfaction and repeat visits.

Sari, I. K., Erwianto, & Haqiqiansyah, G. (2022) This study investigated local community perceptions of marine ecotourism activities in Mutiara Indah Beach, Indonesia. The research problem centered on assessing community support for ecotourism development. Findings showed that while locals recognized economic benefits, concerns about environmental degradation persisted. The study concluded that involving communities in planning and conservation efforts is crucial for sustainable ecotourism.

Zhong, L., & Song, Z. (2010) This study analyzed tourists' perceptions of ecotourism and their attitudes toward environmental management in Jinggangshan Scenic Area, China. The research problem focused on understanding how tourist perceptions influence support for conservation policies. Findings indicated that positive perceptions correlated with higher environmental responsibility. The study concluded that effective communication of conservation benefits can enhance tourist cooperation in sustainable tourism practices.

Dekhili, S., & Achabou, M. A. (2015) This study examined how tourists define and perceive ecotourism, addressing the problem of inconsistent interpretations of the concept. The objective was to identify key expectations associated with ecotourism. Findings revealed that tourists associate ecotourism with nature, sustainability, and education but often conflate it with general nature tourism. The study concluded that clearer marketing and education are needed to align tourist expectations with true ecotourism principles.

Aryal, B., Chhetri, V. T., & Khanal, P. (2022) This study assessed local and visitor perceptions of ecotourism development at Jagadishpur Reservoir, Nepal. The research problem focused on balancing tourism growth with ecological preservation. Findings indicated strong support for ecotourism but highlighted concerns about waste management and infrastructure. The study recommended community-based tourism planning to ensure sustainability.

Lin, S. R., & Zhao, H. X. (2021) This study evaluated tourists' perceptions of off-season ecotourism at Daoxiang Lake, China. The research problem focused on improving destination image during low-demand periods. Findings suggested that promotional strategies emphasizing unique seasonal attractions could boost off-season tourism. The study recommended tailored marketing to enhance sustainable tourism development.

Research Methodology:**Research Design:**

Data Collection: The data for the study was collected from the tourists visiting Kovalam Beach during the peak season. This study used both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through well structured

Interview schedule. Secondary data was collected from Books, Journals and Tourism websites of Ministry of Tourism and Kerala Tourism Development Corporation.

Sampling Techniques: This study considered 150 respondents visited Kovalam Beach adopting purposive sampling techniques for collecting data.

Framework of Analysis: The collected data was analysed with SPSS package and descriptive statistics tools like Simple percentages, figures and tables are used to establish the relationship among variables. Independent sample t test, ANOVA, Chi-Square and Coefficient of Correlation study related test applied for analysing and interpreting the information.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1
Demographic profile of the Respondents

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 1
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Sl No	Variable	Category	No.of Respondents	%
1	Gender	Male	54	36
		Female	96	64
		Total	150	100
2	Age	Below 20 years	24	16
		20 - 35 years	54	36
		35 – 50 years	42	28
		Above 50 years	30	20
		Total	150	100
3	Marital Status	Married	36	24
		Unmarried	114	76
		Total	150	100
4	Educational qualification	Up to SSLC	24	16
		Plus 2	48	32
		Graduate	63	42
		Postgraduate	15	10
		Total	150	100
5	Occupation	Private employment	75	50
		Govt. Employment	24	16
		Business	30	20
		Professionals	21	14
		Total	150	100
6	Monthly income	Below 20000	15	10
		20001 - 30000	54	36
		30001 - 40000	60	40
		Above 40000	21	14
		Total	150	100

shows

demographic profile of respondents in the study area. Out of 150 respondents, the majority 96(64%) are from female category. Regarding the age, the most 54(36%) respondents are from 20-35 years of age group. In terms of education, the majority 63(42%) of respondents are graduates. In terms of occupation, most of the respondents 75(50%) are working in private organisations. The frequency distribution also shows that the majority 60 (40%) of the respondents' monthly income is between Rs.30001 to 40000/-

Independent Sample t test:

The independent sample t-test compares the means between unrelated groups on the same continuous dependent variable.

H_0 : There is no significant difference between males and females with mean scores awareness about ecotourism destination

Table 2
Mean scores awareness about ecotourism destination

Gender	Mean	SD	F	P
Male	124.61	17.016	0.12	0.309
Female	129.28	144.456		

@5% level of significant

Interpretation: Since P value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level of significance. Hence it is concluded that there no statistically significant difference between Males and females with mean scores awareness about ecotourism destination. Based on the mean scores the Female tourists (129.28) have better awareness than Male tourists (124.61).

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance in which there is only one independent variable which can be used to compare mean differences in two or more groups.

H_0 : There is no significant difference between among educational levels with respective to eco-friendly attitude of tourists.

Table 3
Educational levels with respective to eco-friendly attitude of tourists

Education Level	Mean	SD	F	P
Upto SSLC	45.47	9.19	3.718	0.04
Plus 2	32.25	8.78		
Graduate	50.30	13.39		
Post Graduate	37.20	11.80		

@5% level of significance

Interpretation: Since P value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. Hence it is concluded that there is statistically significant difference between amount educational levels with respect to eco-friendly attitude of tourists. Table 3 reveals that mean wise analysis of education levels Upto SSLC (45.47), Plus 2 (32.25), Graduate (50.30) and Postgraduate (37.20). It implies that the degree qualified tourists (mean score 50.30) are very well concentration with the environmental eco- friendly attitudes.

Chi-Square: The chi-square test for independence, also called Pearson's chi-square test is used to discover if there is a relationship between two categorical variables.

H_0 : There is no association between marital status and level of satisfaction about ecotourism

Table 4
The chi-square test showing marital status and level of experience about ecotourism

Marital Status	Level of experience			Total	Pearson Chi-square	P
	Low	Moderate	High			
Married	16 (8%)	17(8%)	17(8%)	50	4.574 ^a	0.10
Unmarried	16(8%)	50(48%)	34(20%)	100		
Total	32	67	51	150		

@5% level of significance

Interpretation: Since P value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is acceptance at 5% level of significance. Hence it is concluded that there no statistically significant difference between marital status and level of experience about ecotourism. The above Chi-square table reveals that majority of the tourists are belonging to moderately experienced on ecotourism destination with the group of unmarried tourists (48%)

Coefficient of Correlation: Coefficient of Correlation test is used to find out if any relationship between awareness and experience of tourists about ecotourism destination

H_0 : There is no relationship between awareness and experience of tourists about ecotourism destination.

Table 5

Coefficient of Correlation about Awareness and Experience of tourists about ecotourism destination.

	Value	Experience
Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.419**
	P	.002

**1% level of significance

Interpretation: Coefficient of correlation between awareness and experience is 0.419** which indicate that positive relationship between awareness and experience at 1% level of significance.

Discussion

Independent sample t test found that female tourist has better awareness of ecotourism destination. Because of majority female are coming from Metro city of resident place and Majority of the female has completed degree level of education. Females have highly aware about environment natural effects, tourist destination facility and economic ability activities.

ANOVA test reveals that accepted the null hypothesis of education level and eco-friendly attitude. Because of majority of the tourist have completed degree level education so that their highly concentration of eco-friendly activities attitudes like that reduce over consumption and waste, promote to economic incentive for conservation and help to nature for bio diversity culture.

Chi square test found that unmarried tourist has moderately associated with their experiences about Marian Beach destination. Because of unmarried tourist more involved natural based experiences and quality of services like that relax spiritually, cost of price, convenient location and bus facilities, relaxation and fairly price service.

Coefficient of correlation results exhibited awareness has strong linear positive relationship with experience of tourist about ecotourism destination

The major findings of study are the eye-openers for all those involved directly and indirectly in the ecotourism projects at Kovalam Beach. All those findings are very indisputable as far as the preservation of rich biodiversity and implementation of sustainable ecotourism is concerned. It was clearly and closely observed that there are fundamental issues related to protect beautiful resource effects, tourist guide, cleanness and personalized care with regard to visitor awareness and experience. Other issues like local people's communication, visitor convenient time, local people relationship, crowding, and neat facilities also give negative experience of tourists. So, Kovalam Beach authorities must develop these kinds of facilities.

Conclusion

Research reveals that most tourists understand the basic principles of ecotourism. However, moving from awareness to consistent eco-friendly behaviour requires a focus on personal behavioural change. The study also shows that while tourists generally adopt eco-friendly attitudes during their visits, their demographic background (sex, region, education) can affect their attraction to ecotourism and lead to varied experiences, including negative ones. Finally, increased tourist awareness improves their choice of destination and overall enhances their travel experience.

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