

HOMESTAYS AS A CATALYST FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF COASTAL AREAS IN KERALA STATE: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Tourism is undoubtedly an important area in a country's economic wellbeing and development. It supports in the socio, cultural and economic prosperity by attracting the foreign currencies to the country, thus leads to the overall upliftment of the economy. Kerala state has a prominent place in the tourism industry of our country and also marks a great position in the world tourism map. As numerous tourists visit our place, it is much needed to provide them with good lodging facilities together with the traditional hospitality and all other natural potentials. Homestays thus promotes tourism by providing good lodging facilities at a very nominal rate. The study focuses on the socio-economic changes taken place in coastal villages through the development of various homestay units, its problems and prospects.

Key words: Tourism, homestay, socio-economic development, services marketing, hospitality, etc.

1. Introduction

Expenditure of one's leisure time away from home for the sake of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, using the commercial provision of services is termed as tourism. It is a product of modern social arrangements which originated in Western Europe in the 17th century. International tourism had become one of the world's most important economic activities by the early twenty first century from the Arctic to Antarctica. In the Western tradition, coordinated travel with shielding infrastructure, with an importance on essential destinations and experiences can be seen in ancient Greece and Rome. It leads to the origins of both heritage tourism and beach resorts. Modern tourism is an intensive,

commercially organized, business-oriented set of activities. Journeys for health, leisure, and culture became common practice among the European middle classes by the 19th century. Beach holidays are an English invention of the 18th century, based on the medical adaptation of popular sea-bathing traditions. Eighteenth century onwards, beach resorts extend across Europe, the Mediterranean, the United States, South Africa, and Latin America to Asia. The beach is only the most attractive settings for the tourist and generates a tourism industry. The global footprint of tourism, its economic, environmental, demographic, and cultural importance was very large at the beginning of the 20th century and continues to grow at a faster rate.

In the present era, tourism is the fastest growing economic sector due to its diversification of destinations. It makes tourism, an agent for socio-economic progress. Today, the quantity of business related to tourism is more than that of oil exports, food products or automobiles and the important source of income for many developing countries. Depending on the quality and revenue, tourism contributes to the economic wellbeing of the people. As the UNWTO points out that the developing countries stand to benefit from sustainable tourism and acts to help make this a reality. As per the report of World Tourism Organization, France received more visitors (86.9 million) than any other country in the world in 2017 to see their major attractions as the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, and the Arc de Triomphe which are located in Paris, the largest city in Europe by population. Chinese outbound travellers spent nearly a 5th of the global tourism spending 258 billion dollars, while U.S. travellers came in second, with 135 billion dollars.

2. Tourism in Kerala

Kerala tourism has gained a lot of tourists from all over the world, especially from the UK, USA, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia because of the local resources, thereby attracting investment and resulting in sustainable development of the people of Kerala. A calm climate, a long shoreline with peaceful beaches, mild stretches of emerald backwaters, green hill stations and exotic wildlife, waterfalls, plantations and paddy fields, ayurvedic health

treatments, fascinating art forms, magical festivals, historical and cultural monuments and exotic cuisine make Kerala a unique experience for all. Kerala has been well known for its practice of Ayurveda. Ayurveda is the traditional health science of India. In Kerala, Ayurveda is a part and parcel of every aspect of life. In fact, it is a lifestyle in Kerala, travellers from the western world reached Kerala for spiritual and physical awakening in 1960s. The largest number of tourists coming to Kerala for Ayurveda is from Germany. The growth rate of tourists flocking for Ayurveda is increasing every year at the rate of around 20-25 per cent. The backwaters of Kerala, a unique product of the state and is found nowhere else in the world. The backwaters of Kerala are a self-regulating ecosystem teeming with aquatic life. The Kerala backwaters offer a spectacular opportunity to see Kerala and are easily traversed by boat.

Table 1

Foreign and Domestic Tourist Arrivals and Earnings Received

Foreign Tourist	
No. of foreign tourists in 2017 (Kerala)	1091870
No. of foreign tourists in 2016(Kerala)	1038419
% variation over previous year (Kerala)	5.15 %
Foreign exchange earnings 2017(Kerala)	8392.11 crore
Foreign exchange earnings 2016(Kerala)	7749.51 crore
% variation over previous year (Kerala)	8.29%
No. of foreign tourists in 2017 (Alappuzha)	75037
No. of foreign tourists in 2016 (Alappuzha)	78049
% variation over previous year (Alappuzha)	-3.86
Domestic Tourist	
No. of domestic tourists in 2017(Kerala)	14673520
No. of domestic tourists in 2016(Kerala)	13172535
% variation over previous year (Kerala)	11.39%
Total revenue generated 2017(Kerala)	33383.68 crore
No. of domestic tourists in 2017 (Alappuzha)	433456
No. of domestic tourists in 2016 (Alappuzha)	315466
% variation over previous year (Alappuzha)	37.4

Source: Kerala Tourism Statistics 2017.

With the heavenly touch of the Arabian Sea, Alleppey popularly known as Venice of East welcomes you to the backwaters of Kerala. The beautiful canals and green shores fluttering with glimpses from the day to day life in the country side, the mirror still lagoons, and its long sandy beach has blessed, the district, to

become one of the best backwater tourism destinations in God's Own Country. In 2016, the Centre for Science and Environment graded Alappuzha as the cleanest town in India. Alappuzha, Venice of East is considered to be the oldest planned city in this region and the lighthouse built near the serene beach is the first of its kind along the Laccadive Sea coast. A town with canals, backwaters, beaches, and lagoons, Alappuzha was described by Lord Curzon as the "Venice of the East."

3. Homestays for tourism

India is famous for its rich traditions and culture and very famous for its saying "Athithi Devo Bhava", which means "The Guest is God". Indians consider it a huge honor to have guests in their home, and try to do whatever possible to satisfy them. There's nothing like Indian hospitality. Unfortunately, most visitors who visit to India and stay in hotels never experience true Indian hospitality. The good news is that is everything is changing as a result of the growing popularity of homestays in India. A homestay is much similar in concept to that of a bed and breakfast. Guests are either accommodated in the family home, or in separate cottages nearby. Nowadays, most homestays provide their guests with as much comfort and facilities as a reputed hotel. The period of stay can extend from one night to over a year and can be provided for free, for monetary payment, home exchange in which host share their home now looking for a future sharing of the home of guest, or in exchange for housekeeping or work on the host's property. However, they must be comfortable with others using at least part of their home. Homestays provides several benefits to their guests that include savings on accommodation costs, local information sharing that is not easily found in guidebooks, a deeper understanding of the everyday life of the local people, opportunities to stay in places where there are no hotels or hostels, and opportunities to stay in unique properties such as tents, cabins, and castles. In cases where students studying abroad stay with a family, the host family may play a pseudo-parental role, giving advice and sometimes supervising students' activities and even studies. In some homestays, families act as cross-cultural advisers, helping the students understand and adjust to their new culture and environment.

4. Literature review

Lindberg and Enriquez (1994) noted lot of examples of native earnings from employment related to tourism in Belize, Nepal, Costa Rica and Australia. Not only economic benefits, tourism also contribute to improve inter-cultural appreciation and understanding both for host and tourist communities.

Ferhan (2006) identified that the faster development and high concentration of tourist activities cause negative effects on both natural and cultural atmosphere, and when investment of locals is marginal or lacking, the results would be particularly unacceptable to the host community.

Manoj (2008) studied the prospects of sustainable tourism in Kerala from an international viewpoint and extended some methods for the faster development of sustainable tourism activities in Kerala.

Na Le (2009) analysed the service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. The study identified that customer expectations and views of both men and women, Asian and European guests and disabled people related to the hotel services and found that customer expectation and perception varies among men and women, among people of Asia and Europe. The study suggested that the hoteliers should make services much more convenient for the disabled people so that they can use all the services provided.

Sobhana Devi (2014) identified that different category of accommodation operators look on to maximizing profits without having concern for sustainable tourism development. Hoteliers have utterly failed in the duty of sharing resource for protection of environment and the society.

Pazir Dil and Amin Insha (2015) stated that service providers need to render their services in such a manner that they meet the expectations of the customers and also enhance their services to meet the changing global scenario. Hotels must be customer centric, should provide customized services, focus on handling the complaints of the customers and addressing their grievances. They

must provide the services when asked for which will help them in building a good image and gaining loyalty.

5. Need for the study

As the study area is one of the most popular tourist attractions of Kerala State, it is to be analysed that whether there are enough places to accommodate the tourists. Only through providing good facilities for accommodation, the government can attract more tourists to the place. Here lies the importance of homestay units. It is much needed to check the existing homestay owners were satisfied with the business and also with the support extended by the government authorities. The study is much needed to find out the socio-economic changes taking places in the coastal villages of Alappuzha district after the emergence of homestay units. A need was felt to analyze the homestay tourism in Alleppey, Kerala state which will act as a search light to understand the socio-economic importance of homestays in the development of rural people in Marari Beach Village of Alleppey district. The study throws light to the entrepreneurial view towards homestay tourism in Alleppey, Kerala state which helps to know the problems and prospects of the said kind of business opportunity.

6. Objectives of the study

1. To examine the socio-economic changes happened in coastal areas after the emergence of homestay business.
2. To know about the tourist inflow to the Kerala state and Alappuzha district.
3. To analyse the problems and prospects faced by homestay owners.

7. Research methodology

The study is based on primary as well as the secondary data. An attempt has been made to know the societal and economic changes taken place after the emergence of homestay units in coastal villages of Alappuzha district by selecting 110 homestay owners in Mararikulam panchayat of Alappuzha district. Convenience sampling method is used to select the respondents. Schedule method

is used to collect the information from the respondents. Various journals, books and websites form the secondary sources of information. The collected data is analysed by using percentages.

8. Data analysis

Table 2

Field of Work of Respondents before Starting Homestay

Work	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Fishing related works	79	72
Coir related works	3	3
Skilled works (carpenter, mason, painting etc.)	17	15
Unskilled works	7	6
Private company jobs	2	2
Government jobs	0	0
Unemployed	0	0
Others	2	2
Total	110	100

Table 3

Respondents' Acceptance towards doing the Previous Job Currently

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, together with running homestay	106	96
No, completely focussing on homestay	0	0
I am doing the same job and my family members are engaged in homestay	4	4
Total	110	100

Table 4

Level of Satisfaction towards Different Statements

Responses	VDS		DS		N		S		VS		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Opinion about government and local authority support	12	11	90	82	8	7	0	0	0	0	110	100
Are you satisfied with the business of homestay	0	0	0	0	0	0	77	70	33	30	110	100

Table 5

Level of Agreement towards Different Statements

Responses	SD		D		N		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
My income has increased after starting homestay	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	11	98	89	110	100
My assets are increased and liabilities are decreased after starting homestay business.	0	0	0	0	0	0	85	77	25	23	110	100
I feel socially accepted than before.	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	15	94	85	110	100
I feel confident than before.	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	104	95	110	100
It is very easy to start the homestay business.	21	19	80	73	9	8	0	0	0	0	110	100
I feel like I am creating good relationships worldwide.	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	108	98	110	100
I feel that my guest(customers) are very happy and satisfied with the services I offer them.	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	12	97	88	110	100
I am sure that I can improve the service quality in future.	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	105	95	110	100
I am sure that my financial strength will improve in future with the help of homestay business.	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	11	98	89	110	100

Table 6
Problems Faced in Running Homestay Business

Responses	NP		MNP		MDP		SP		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Regular strikes and harthals.	22	20	85	77	3	3	0	0	110	100
Problems with the procedure of homestay license.	0	0	0	0	20	18	90	82	110	100
Problems in getting financial assistance from banks and other institutions.	0	0	5	5	30	27	75	68	110	100
Problems from the society I live.	54	49	56	51	0	0	0	0	110	100
Problems from other homestay units and competitors.	32	29	78	71	0	0	0	0	110	100
Problems arising out of the news broadcasted about the epidemic diseases, terrorist attacks and natural disasters.	0	0	0	0	102	93	8	7	110	100

9. Findings

1. Alappuzha district contributes a small portion of total tourist arrivals (433456 domestic tourists and 75037 foreign tourists in 2017) even though there are plenty of tourist attractions. Hence, steps should be taken to improve the number of tourists to the district by making the place a good hub for lodging.

2. About 72% of the respondents belong to fishing related business before starting the homestay business which is followed by skilled workers (15%) which clearly specifies a radical change in their social well-being.
3. 96% of the respondents still continue their previous job together with running the homestay business. None of the respondents were completely focussing on homestay business.
4. Majority of the respondents (82%) are dissatisfied with the support extended by the government and local authority for homestay tourism. 70% of the respondents are satisfied with the business of homestay.
5. Majority of the respondents (89%) strongly agree that their income has increased after starting homestay business. 77% of the respondents agree that their assets has increased and liabilities are decreased after entering into the homestay business. Majority of the respondents (85%) strongly agree that they feel socially accepted than before and (95%) strongly agree that they feel much confident than before. 73% of the respondents disagree to the statement “It is very easy to start the homestay business”. 98% of the respondents strongly agree that they feel like they are creating worldwide relationships. Majority (88%) of the respondents strongly agree that their customers are very happy and satisfied with the services provided by them, 95% strongly agree that they can improve the service quality in future.
6. The major problems faced by the respondents were the problems related to the procedures for getting homestay license (82% marked as a serious problem) which is followed by (68% marked as a serious problem) the problems in getting financial assistance from banks and other institutions. Respondents usually not facing any issues from local people and from competitors.

10. Conclusion

The study focused on the economic and societal changes taken place after the emergence of homestay units in coastal villages of Mararikulam panchayat of Alappuzha district. The study focused on the major problems faced by the

homestay owners. The social and economic scenarios of rural people have been changed after entering into homestay business. But the entrepreneurs are not satisfied with the government support for conducting the business. If government provides them enough support by liberalizing the procedures and rules, a greater number of entrepreneurs will be much benefitted which further leads to the social and economic development of the community. It is much appreciated that the people belong to the poor households are now changed their standard of living just because they started homestays.

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