

Kick Starting the Post-Flood Kerala Tourism: An Adventure Trip

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Abstract – Kerala state in India has got one of the best tourism resources in the whole nation. The State has been successfully utilising its unique brand 'God's own Country' for promoting its tourism activities and to attract the tourists, especially the foreign tourists. The unique features of Kerala, particularly its exceptional natural beauty, lengthy coastal areas and comfortable climate throughout the year etc. could fetch Kerala many awards and honors, year after year. Despite its vast tourism potential, Kerala's performance in the tourism front has not been very encouraging since 2010 in terms of the annual growth rates. The flood deluge that occurred in Aug. 2018 has adversely affected Kerala tourism. In the above context, this paper suggests encouraging various niche areas too, along with the established types like Responsible Tourism (RT) and Ecotourism, so that tourism sector in the State can recover faster from the present stagnancy and contribute positively to the economic development of the State. The case of Adventure Tourism is focused in this paper relevance is analyzed based on the peculiar features of Kerala's natural environment. Accordingly, strategies for the faster growth of this niche segment are suggested.

Key Words – Adventure Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Foreign Tourist Arrivals, Foreign Exchange Earnings.

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INTRODUCTION

The vast potential of tourism for rapid economic development and employment generation is widely acknowledged in the literature. Many countries, mostly developing nations including India, have started aggressively promoting tourism to help attain faster economic development by attracting more foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs), thus more foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) too. Like many other nations of the world, especially the developing world, India too has been greatly promoting tourism for rapid economic growth. Given its exceptional tourism resources India has special some advantages in tourism, like, its rich cultural heritage, world-renowned historical sites including monuments like Taj Mahal, world famous festivals, etc. Within India, Kerala has got one of the best tourism resources in the whole nation. Govt. of Kerala (GOK) has been using its unique brand 'Kerala—the God's own Country' to aggressively market its tourism products by projecting its exceptional natural beauty, rich biodiversity, conducive climate around the year, etc. Kerala can boast of its reputed festivals, lengthy coastal lines having many beaches too. Above all, Kerala has got world-renowned historical sites having a rich history of trade relations with many

foreign countries, from historical times. (eg. Muziris in central Kerala). Despite the enviable tourism resources of Kerala and also the numerous awards and honors won by it by leveraging such resources, Kerala's global competitiveness in terms of the acceptance by the foreign tourists is declining, and is noted in the falling trend in the annual growth rates in FTAs and FEEs into Kerala, noted Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. (2016) (a) [3]. So, the authors have suggested for extension of environment friendly measures like 'Green Carpet' initiative of GOK in their another paper, Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. (2016) (b) [4], which is a continuation of the former. Besides, environmental degradation has been attributed as the root cause for the falling performance of Kerala tourism. This paper aims to study the scope of augmenting the tourism activities in Kerala by promoting the Adventure Tourism. It can reinforce the major tourism models like Responsible Tourism (RT), Ecotourism etc. which are highly promoted by GOK.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Kerala's enviable potential in tourism due to its exceptional natural beauty, conducive climate and

rich cultural heritage etc. is widely recognized. The efforts of the Govt. of Kerala (GOK) to project Kerala's exemplary tourism resources using its unique brand '*God's own Country*' is fetching rich dividends to the State. Many awards and honors, both and international, that Kerala could win is a testimony in this regard. Thus, Kerala's position is one the best in India and the whole world. It is regarded as one of the 'must see' destinations in the world. But, Kerala's huge tourism potential is still underutilized (Manoj, P. K., 2008) [7], and it is becoming less preferred and its global competitiveness is falling. (Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. 2016)(a)[3]. There are many concerns regarding the sustainability of Kerala's natural environment and hence nature based sectors, like tourism. Its natural environment faces serious threats because the unscientific and unscrupulous use of its precious natural resources results in 'ecological overkill' and this over-exploitation of Kerala's natural resources still continues, and many of the crises environmental crises being faced by Kerala are rather 'irreversible' (Oommen, M. A., 2008) [14] and as tourism that does not harm the nature alone has got long term sustainability (Manoj, P. K, 2010) [8], ways and means of environmentally sustainable and economically viable tourism should be identified in the Kerala context. Given the fact that some precious natural resources have already been 'irreversibly lost' due to the 'ecological overkill' (Oommen, M. A., 2008)[14], new schemes like the Green Carpet initiative are relevant and such schemes need to be further extended too (Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P.K. 2016)(b)[4]. Niche areas of tourism, like, Adventure Tourism, Cruise Tourism, Spice Tourism etc. could be encouraged in Kerala along with the established models like Responsible Tourism (RT) and Ecotourism which are being aggressively promoted by the GOK. The case of Adventure Tourism in particular has been focused in this paper, because of its bright growth prospects in the State given the peculiar geographic and natural environment that is conducive for its sustained growth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (i) To make an overall study of Kerala Tourism and its relative performance and competitive position in India;
- (ii) To study in detail the case of Adventure Tourism and its relevance in rejuvenating Kerala Tourism; and
- (iii) To suggest suitable strategies for enhancing the performance and competitiveness of Kerala Tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is a descriptive-analytical study and is exploratory too. It is based on secondary data from

authentic sources, like the reports and policy documents by Departments of Tourism of Govt. of Kerala (GOK) and Govt. of India (GOI), reports of international agencies like United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). Only basic statistical tools are used in this exploratory type study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many studies on tourism that have analyzed its economic impacts, its benefits to the economy, like, earnings derived from tourism, especially the foreign exchange earnings (FEEs). But, studies on tourism focusing on the relevance of niche tourism segments like Spice Route Project of Spice Tourism are very scarce. Huybers and Bennet (2003) [6] in their paper have studied the vital need for proper environmental management at nature-based tourism destinations so that competitiveness and sustainability of these destinations could be enhanced. The serious aspect that needs deliberation here is the real concern of the tourism policy in ensuring competitiveness of the tourism destinations and hence their long-term sustainability by insisting on strict norms for environmental protection, bio-diversity conservation etc. This aspect is vitally significant for Kerala as its competitiveness and long-term sustainability are growingly under threat, because an 'Ecological Overkill' situation persists in Kerala (Oommen, M. A., 2008) [14] which could adversely affect Kerala's ecology and environment. Environmental crises adversely affect the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism operations in Kerala. A macro level analysis on the sustainability of tourism sector in India with a focus on Kerala's tourism sector done by Manoj P K (2008) [7], 'Sustainable Tourism in India: A Study from a Global Perspective with Focus on Tourism Prospects of Kerala' has studied the vast growth prospects of India's tourism sector from a global perspective. The case of Kerala tourism and its special characteristics have been dealt in detail in this paper. Based on the findings of the study, the author has suggested measures for the faster growth of Kerala tourism in a sustainable way.

An ecotourism study (book) authored by Singh, S. (2009)[17] has noted that ecotourism is an entirely a new approach in tourism. It offers avenues for tourists to experience powerful displays of nature, and also to learn about the significance of biodiversity, conservation and local cultures. A macro level study by Manoj P K (2010) [8], 'Environment Friendly Tourism for Sustainable Economic Development in India', has pointed out the immense growth prospects of Indian tourism and its role in faster economic development of India. This study has clearly noted the vital need for preserving the natural environment by all tourism initiatives, and pointed out that only environment-friendly initiatives are sustainable. Another study by

Manoj P K (2010) [9], 'Tourism in Kerala: A Study of the Imperatives and Impediments with Focus on Ecotourism', in *Saaransh-RKG Journal of Management*, has analyzed Kerala's tourism sector in detail by using the SWOT analysis method. Based on his findings, the author has suggested measures for the fast and sustainable growth of Kerala tourism. Sudheer, B (2015)[18] in his study on Responsible Tourism (RT) at Kumarakom has noted that RT practices can mitigate the adverse environmental effects of tourism and can ensure long term sustainability. Regarding the Kumarakom RT project, its positive effects (like, employment to the local people), empowerment of local women from RT-based jobs (like, providing vegetables, fish, meat etc.—all procured locally), favorable linkage effects RT on the local population (eg. earnings from the purchases made by tourists) etc. have been discussed.

World Economic Forum (WEF)(2015)[19] in its report on tourism competitiveness has noted in detail the competitiveness of the nations of the world .It has listed the competitiveness indices of nations, at the regional and global levels, using well-defined parameters. The global competitiveness of Indian tourism is 52 as against 17 of China. At the regional (Asia Pacific region) level too, while India has 12th rank China is ahead at the 6th rank. An empirical study of ecotourism in Kerala by Manoj P. K.(2015)(a)[10], 'Prospects of Ecotourism in Kerala: Evidence from Kumarakom in Kottayam District' has studied prospects of ecotourism in that location and based on his findings, the author has suggested strategies for the sustainable development of ecotourism. Another study by Manoj P. K (2015)(b)[11], 'Employment Generation from Rural Tourism: A Field Study of the Local Community at Kumbalangi, Kerala' has studied the feedback of the local people regarding the employment prospects of rural tourism based on their views, their expectations on the suitable interventions by Govt. of Kerala (GOK), etc. The bright prospects for employment creation and economic development have been noted, but this is subject to the expansion of the tourism infrastructure, primarily through GOK initiatives.

WTTC (2015) [20] in its comprehensive report on the economic impact of tourism and travel industry gives the relative performance in tourism of different nations of the world, along with region-wise performance and future projections. WTTC has noted that South Asian region, spearheaded India and the Middle East, is globally the fastest growing region in terms of the share of Travel and Tourism sector to the GDP value. India is one of the large and fast growing markets along with China, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey. It is also reported that South Asia will be the fastest growing sub-region in its long-run growth till 2025 (7.0 percent for Travel & Tourism, in GDP), and India will outpace China by 2025. A study by Manoj P K (2016)(a) [12], "Impact

of Rural Tourism on the Environment and Society: Evidence from Kumbalangi in Kerala, India" in *International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies* has noted the definite positive impact of rural tourism but has warned about the vital need for preserving environmental quality by way of strictly limiting the number of tourists, prohibiting the use of non-degradable materials (like, plastic items), exercising more emphasis on environmental cleanliness, and so on. An empirical study in the Kerala context by Manoj P. K. (2016) (b) [13], "Determinants of Sustainability of Rural Tourism: A Study of Tourists at Kumbalangi in Kerala, India", in *International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies* has identified the factors influencing the sustainability of rural tourism in Kerala and suggested strategies for tourism promotion from a long-term view. First strategy is that of preserving the natural environment which is of "paramount significance". Others strategies suggested include (1) good service and safety to tourists, (2) preserving the culture of the local people, (3) improving transportation and other infrastructure facilities, (4) enhancing ICT-based facilities. A recent paper by Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. (2016) (a) [3], "Environmental Concerns and Tourism Performance: A Study of Kerala State", *International Journal of Trade and Global Business Perspectives*, has sought to specifically look into the environmental issues concerning the sustainability of Kerala tourism and the tourism policies of GOK in terms of their conformity with environmental protection and sustainable tourism development in Kerala. As a continuation of this study, another study by the same authors, Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. (2016)(b) [4], "Green Carpet Initiative: An Environment Friendly Project Targeted at Sustainability and Competitiveness of Tourism Sector in Kerala State in India" in *International Journal of Trade and Global Business Perspectives*, has sought to look at the new project of GOK named Green Carpet initiative for improving the competitiveness and sustainability of Kerala tourism by attracting more tourists especially the foreign tourists and the authors have suggested for extension of this initiative. A study by Pradeep P. et.al (2017) [15], "Community Based Tourism for the Sustained Economic Development of Kerala: A Study with a Focus on Ecotourism" in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review*, has discussed the vast scope of Community Based Tourism (CBT) for the sustained economic development of a State like Kerala in India. The case of Ecotourism has been specially noted in the paper. In a more focused paper on Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) by Rajagopal Nayar et. al. (2017) [16], "Perspectives on Community Based Ecotourism (CBET): Relevance of CBET for the Sustained Economic Development of Kerala, India" in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review*, the vital significance of Community Based Ecotourism

(CBET) for the sustained growth of Kerala tourism and hence the Kerala economy as a whole has been discussed, and some strategies for the sustained growth of CBET in Kerala have been suggested. A recent study by Robin Biddulph & Regina Scheyvens (2018) [5], "Introducing inclusive tourism, Tourism Geographies" has introduced the concept of inclusive tourism. Accordingly those who are typically marginalized by (excluded from) the mainstream tourism are sought to be brought into the industry so that they are benefited out of it and they would get better control in the industry. For attaining wider socio-economic and equitable development, this concept has been introduced as an analytical concept or an aspirational ideal, using examples from five diverse global contexts.

Despite many studies on tourism, including a few studies done in the Kerala context, studies that specifically focus on the relevance of niche tourism types like Adventure Tourism in the Kerala context are virtually nil. Hence this paper seeks to study the niche area viz. Adventure Tourism and its relevance and significance for the rejuvenation of Kerala tourism which is facing setbacks, like, falling annual growth rates in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) and foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) and lately the adverse impact of the flood that occurred in Aug. 2018.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Unique Features Kerala Tourism

Kerala in Indian union has got many unique advantages that differentiate this small State at the southernmost part of India from the rest of the country. Its precious resources or unique benefits are not effectively utilized at present, but there is enough scope for these being used in the future. These distinct features, include inter alia, the following:

- Kerala has its own unique historical trade relations with many nations of the world from times immemorial and these relations have given it a very rich and extremely diverse cultural heritage. The 'Spice Route' that this State had in the past with foreign countries is one such unique feature. (This aspect is discussed in detail in the next session of this paper). The highest level of migration of Keralites to other nations and also the State's largest share of foreign remittances in the whole nation. Because of these international connections, Kerala has got a special advantage in attracting foreign tourists.
- Kerala is the first State in India that has granted industry status to the tourism sector way back in 1986. The State has been extending all the privileges and incentives whatever are enjoyed by other

industries to tourism sector also. The industry status granted as above has been with the object of giving Kerala the much awaited 'investor-friendly atmosphere'. Besides, Kerala Tourism is supposed to have adopted the most liberalized tourism policies in the whole of India, by adopting a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model in tourism. Thus, the Govt. of Kerala (GOK) plays the role of a facilitator or catalyst while the private players actively participate and make investments too. This approach has been envisaged to attract sizeable investments by the private players in the tourism sector.

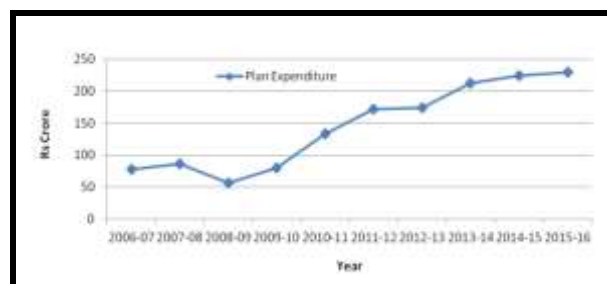
- As per the Official publication of GOK (2016), the share of the tourism sector to the total employment generated in Kerala is more than double the national average. (Table I).

Table I: Contribution of Tourism sector to Total Employment of Kerala (2009-2012)

Share in Employment (in Percentage)			
Country / State	Direct Impact	Indirect & Induced Impact	Total Impact
India	04.4	05.8	10.2
Kerala	09.9	13.6	23.5

Source: Govt. of Kerala (2016), *Economic Review 2015*, March.

- Besides the higher employment generation from tourism (more than double the national average, Table I), regarding the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP of the State (GSDP) too, Kerala is far ahead the same being 10 percent of the Kerala's GSDP. This share is one of the highest in the whole of India, and the national average is only 7 percent.
- The Plan expenditure by the GOK on the tourism sector of the State is one of the highest in the whole of India, and is constantly growing too, year after year. (Figure I).



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2016), *Economic Review 2015*, March.

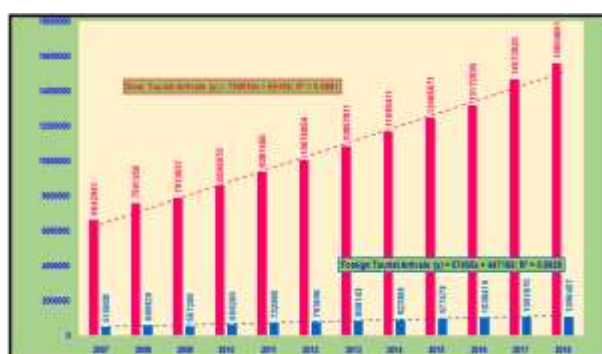
Figure I: Public Expenditure on Tourism in Kerala State – Growing Trend

Leveraging its unique advantages noted above, Kerala could win many national and international awards, prizes and other distinctions in tourism every year. These honors have emanated mainly from Kerala's unmatched and picturesque natural beauty and many other favorable factors, like, its historical trade tie-ups with foreign nations. Even today, Kerala has the highest share of migrant population living abroad). The first Responsible Tourism destination (Kumarakom, Kottayam district), the first Model Tourism Village (Kumbalangi, Ernakulam district), the first planned Ecotourism project (Thenmala, Kollam district) etc. are all in Kerala. These peculiarities fetch many honors to Kerala. It is seen that there have been growing trends in absolute figures of DTAs, FTAs and Total Tourism Revenues, over the years. (Figure II & Figure III).



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2019), *Kerala Tourism Statistics 2018*, Jan..2019, p. 248.

Figure II: Kerala Tourism: Growing Trend in Absolute Figures of Total Revenues



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2019), *Kerala Tourism Statistics 2018*, Jan..2019, p. 248.

Figure III: Kerala Tourism: Growing Trend in Absolute Figures of DTAs, FTAs and Revenues

Kerala Tourism: Competitive Position in India

Despite many unique advantages and distinct features of Kerala tourism and the growing trend in

Tourism Revenues (Figure II) and also in Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTAs), Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) (Figure III) year after year, the fact is that its global competitiveness is gradually declining and Kerala is becoming a less preferred destination for tourists, particularly the foreign tourists. The annual growth rates in FTAs and FEEs over the years have been falling, even though there have been steady growth in their absolute figures. (Figure IV & Figure V).



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2019), *Kerala Tourism Statistics 2018* and IBEF (2019), *Kerala God's own Country*

Figure IV: Y-on-Y Growth Rates (%): Falling Trend in FTAs and Stagnant (slowly Falling) Trend in DTAs

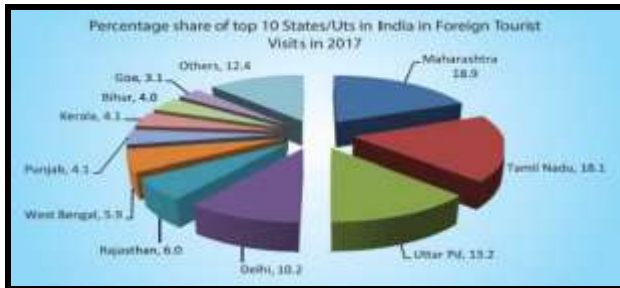
From Figure IV, it may be that though there has been gradual increase in the tourist arrivals into Kerala, there has been an overall declining trend in the annual growth rates (percentage) in the FTAs into Kerala. Even in respect of DTAs, the annual growth rates are somewhat stagnant (and slightly declining too) in nature. So, growth in the absolute figures of tourist arrivals year after year has been only marginal, over the years, and the yearly growth rates have been falling, particularly in respect of FTAs. Figure IV is self-explanatory of this situation. Similarly, in respect of FEEs, there have been falling annual growth rates though absolute figures grow marginally. (Figure V).



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2019), *Kerala Tourism Statistics 2018*, Jan. 2019. (2018 Figures-Provisional)

Figure V: FEEs into Kerala -Absolute figures are slowly growing, but Y-on-Y Rates (%) are falling

The public expenditure on tourism by GOK is one of the largest in India and is growing fast, every year (Figure I). It accounts for 1.27 percent of the GDP of the State (Kerala's GSDP) whereas the average public expenditure of the whole India is 0.49 percent of India's GDP. But, the share of FTAs into Kerala is only 4.2 percent of the total FTAs and Kerala ranks only in the 7th rank at the national level, as of 2015 and 2016, both. Its position has further worsened in 2017 when it has only 4.1 percent share and rank has fallen to 8th in India. Hence, Kerala's competitive position is not at all commensurate with the huge and growing public expenditure on the tourism sector incurred by the State over the years. (Figure VI).



Source: Govt. of India (2018), *India Tourism Statistics 2018*, Dec.

Figure VI: Kerala's Share in FTAs into India (2017) – Further Fall from 2016 and 2015

Earlier studies, like, Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. (2016)(a)[3] have noted that one main reason for the falling competitiveness of Kerala tourism, especially in attracting FTAs into Kerala, is the environmental degradation of the tourist destinations arising from plastic littering, unbridled construction activities, losing greenery, poor hygiene and cleanliness. So, the need for promoting and also extending environment-friendly tourism projects (like, 'Green Carpet' initiative) has been suggested by Aneeb K Jose, and Manoj, P. K. (2016)(b)[4]. In this context, alternative models like 'Spice Route', 'Adventure Tourism', 'Cruise Tourism' etc. should be encouraged, and be nurtured too in an environment-friendly manner. In this paper, the attempt is to focus on Adventure Tourism and to study its significance in Kerala for the sustained tourism development and hence the whole Kerala economy.

Promotion of Adventure Tourism in Kerala: Relevance and Scope

The peculiar geographical, climatic and natural environment factors characterising the Kerala state in India being very relevant for the healthy growth of tourism in general and certain niche areas of tourism in particular (say, for instance, Spice Route tourism project because of peculiar historical and cultural background, Cruise tourism because of special locational advantage and historically reputed ports, and so on). In respect of Adventure Tourism also, which is the focus area of this paper, Kerala's promising features make it an ideal destination for

adrenaline junkies. The diverse topography of Kerala makes the state an ideal destination to locate one activity or the other to enjoy, as far as adventurous activities are concerned. These adventure tourism destinations in Kerala range from wildlife sanctuaries to hill stations and backwaters. Tourists of any age can indulge in diverse kinds of adventure sports in Kerala which include paragliding, trekking, hiking, and biking, canoeing, fishing, bamboo rafting, scuba diving, etc.

Govt. of Kerala (GOK) has got elaborate machinery to promote major kinds of tourism like Responsible Tourism (RT). The Responsible Tourism Mission (RT Mission) is just one such initiative and similar ones are there in respect of ecotourism etc. In respect of the niche area of tourism viz. Adventure tourism, though there is society viz. Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society (KATPS) formed by the GOK for the promotion of adventure tourism in Kerala, promotional activities in the area of Adventure Tourism are rather limited. Two of the most popular and fully established adventure tourism activities now available in Kerala having international standards are (i) Paragliding at Wagamon in Idukki District, and (ii) Parasailing at Payyambalam beach in Kannur District.

The relevance and need for Adventure Tourism and such other less publicized and niche tourism segments arise from the fact that these tourism segments can (i) augment the tourism revenues of Kerala, especially the FEEs, which are on the decline, (ii) they can make the tourism development more balanced and equitable, (iii) huge rush of tourists in more prominent destinations can be reduced by attracting some of them to these more specialized and promising tourism segments. Equally important is the need to promote less popular but highly promising tourist destinations in Kerala, the State being endowed with many such destinations. Thus, the tourism development can be made faster, sustainable and also balanced or equitable, by promoting the niche segments like Adventure Tourism.

Major Kinds of Adventure Tourism Activities which are Available in Kerala

Backwaters: In fact, everyone would prefer to enjoy a romantic and delightful houseboat tour in the serene backwaters which are available in plenty in Kerala. As part of enjoying the backwaters, one can explore sleeping villages and palm-fringed shores. The tourists can experience the unique culture with on-board meals while enjoying a tour of Kerala backwaters. The backwater cruises at Alleppey and Kumarakom are the most reputed ones.

Scuba Diving in Kerala: Scuba diving and snorkelling are very interesting sports available in Kerala. Kovalam and Varkala Beaches are

particularly popular for scuba diving. Kerala tourism promotes this wonderful sports which can be enjoyed by even the non-swimmers with the guidance of professional instructors, at very reasonable prices.

Trekking in Kerala: One of the prominent spots for adventure tourism in Kerala located in the Western Ghats depict many trails that can be enjoyed during any season of the year. Those interested in viewing mountains or in mountaineering or allied activities can visit locations such as Munnar, Vagamon and Wayanad and experience their lush landscapes. These are perfect locations for adventure activities such as trekking, hiking, and mountain climbing.

Paragliding in Kerala: One of the most reputed placed for paragliding in South India is in Kerala - the picturesque Wagon hills in the Idukki District of the State. Tandem Paragliding in Vagamon permits stunning views of the marvellous landscapes of this region and attracts many an adventure enthusiast.

Kayaking in Kerala: For tourists who are interested in adventure trips, the *God's Own Country* offers avenues for venturing out in the natural surroundings of Kerala, on a kayak. Kerala has got many destinations having an intricate network of canals and backwaters that lure the kayaking enthusiasts into this State. Major tourist spots for kayaking trips in the State include, inter alia, Alleppey (Alappuzha), Calicut (Kozhikode), and Kasaragod.

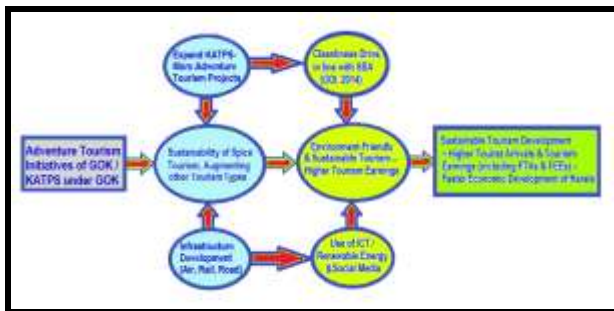
Water Sports in Kerala: Tourists to Kerala can easily personalize their itinerary as per the exact type of adventure trips they would like to indulge in the State. The water sports enthusiasts can prefer destinations such as Kovalam, Alleppey (Alappuzha), and Kumarakom because these locations have many mesmerizing beaches and backwaters.

Snake Boat Race in Kerala: Snake Boat Races are unique boat races held annually during the season of 'Onam' – the reputed harvest festival of Kerala in autumn. As the name suggests, snake boat races use snake-shaped boats. A boat race (*Vallam Kali*, in Malayalam) is a traditional event (sport) in Kerala and is performed in rivers or lakes or backwaters. One of the most popular boat races viz. The Nehru Trophy Boat Race is held in the Punnamada Lake near Alleppey (Alappuzha) and it attracts thousands of tourists every year, from all over the world. Snake boat races are often organised in Kollam, Kottayam, Ernakulam, and Trissur districts of Kerala. The exceptional beauty of the State, coupled with turquoise blue sea, sun-kissed beaches, lush green hills and craggy mountains promise perfect destinations for many an adventure sport, for all sorts of adventure enthusiasts from across the globe.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SUSTAINED GROWTH OF SPICE TOURISM IN KERALA

- By way of promoting Adventure Tourism, Kerala tourism can attract more tourists to the State. Using the present platform KATPS and also further strengthening it, Adventure Tourism be projected more. Brand building for this segment needs to be scaled up along with other brands like ecotourism. The Govt. of Kerala (GOK) should focus more on this niche segment by leveraging the special features supporting its growth.
- Any tourism initiative needs a well-developed infrastructure as a vital pre-requisite, and Adventure Tourism is exception. For attracting tourists and thus ensuring the sustainability of the tourism sector, facilities like Air connectivity, Rail and Road networks, broad band internet connectivity etc. are essential for attracting the modern tourists especially the foreign tourists. One limitation of Kerala Tourism is the relatively poor road network. This needs to be corrected and proper upkeep and extension of the extant road network be ensured.
- Special attention be paid for making all tourist destinations 'Green' by ensuring least damage to the ecology and environment. Equally important is the need for keeping all destinations clean and hygienic too, because losing greenery as well as waste-dumping (like, plastic littering) has been one of the major reasons that repel foreign tourists from tourist destinations in Kerala. It may be noted that here that initiatives like the ones noted above could be dove-tailed very well with the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (or, SBA in short, meaning Clean India Mission) of the Govt. of India (GOI) to a large extent, 'Cleanliness' being its central theme of SBA. The initiative of Kerala tourism (2016) viz. 'Green Carpet', for instance, seeks to ensure cleanliness of tourist destinations in Kerala in an environment-friendly manner and is in line with SBA of GOI too.
- Promotion of the use of renewable energy sources (like, solar power) is highly advisable as it reduces the pollution caused from the use of fossil fuels like diesel and makes the environment cleaner. So also, electric vehicles (e.g. Electric powered Auto) be promoted. The solar-powered boat 'Aditya' is an example in Kerala.

- Better adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the 'New Normal' in every sphere of human life. So, ICT be duly integrated with all Adventure Tourism initiatives and KATPS projects as well. Accordingly, ICT-based services including Wi-Fi connectivity be ensured at all destinations. For marketing of tourism products also, ICT-based tools including social media be widely used. These ICT-based tools are much more 'environment-friendly' than traditional modes such as brochures, banners, pamphlets, hoardings, etc. Widespread use of ICT for online reservations, bookings, enquiries etc. should also be encouraged.
- In view of the foregoing analysis, a model is suggested for the sustainable development of Kerala tourism through promotion of Adventure Tourism, along with protection of environment and ecology (Figure VII).



Source: Developed by the Authors

Figure VII: Promoting Kerala's Adventure Tourism for Enhancing the State's Tourism Earnings: A Model.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

It is noted that Kerala could perform reasonably well in the tourism front over the years. The State could project its tourism products in the domestic as well as foreign markets effectively, and could use ICT-based tools meaningfully for this purpose. However, in spite of these achievements, the fact remains that Kerala's performance is poor when compared with its huge and also growing investments in its tourism sector. Likewise, despite Kerala's marginal increase in absolute figures of FTAs and FEEs, the State's annual growth rates in FTAs and FEEs are on the decline since 2010. In the above context, it is sensible to aggressively promote various niche segments of tourism, along with the more prominent tourism segments like Responsible Tourism and Ecotourism, so as to augment the total earnings of Kerala Tourism as a whole. The case of Adventure Tourism deserves special attention in this regard, as it can help to improve the performance of Kerala Tourism, and hence to reverse the falling trends in

FTAs and FEEs over the last few years. The functioning of KATPS needs to be further strengthened and more adventure tourism projects need to be included within its ambit. As a continuation of the present study, it seems meaningful to further explore into the following topics which are very much related to this study: (1) Prospects of Cruise Tourism in Kerala, (2) Use of ICT for Marketing of Tourism in Kerala – Imperatives and Impediments, (3) Wellness Tourism in Kerala: For Leveraging the Potential of Kerala Ayurveda, (4) Medical Value Travel in Kerala – Prospects and Challenges, (5) Promotion of Digital Healthcare in Kerala for Faster Development of Medical Tourism, and so on.

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