

**Notification Date:** 16/11/2023

**Notification Number:** F. NO. COE/Ph.D./(Notification)/549/2023

**Student's Name:** Mohd Arman

**Supervisor's Name:** Dr. Abdul Qadir

**Department:** Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management

**Title of Thesis:** Community's response to tourism at rural tourism destinations

**Keywords:** Rural Tourism, Community based tourism, Responsible tourism, Village tourism, Kerala tourism

## **Findings**

Rural Tourism has undoubtedly reached a significant milestone and is a successful village tourism initiative in Kumarakom village, Kovalam village and community based tourism initiative in Thekkady village. The response of the local communities at three major rural tourism villages of Kerala has highlighted the immense potential and importance of rural tourism in contributing to the sustainable development and the empowerment of rural communities.

Rural tourism in the aforementioned destinations certainly offers a unique chance to display the rich cultural heritage, diversified traditions, and natural beauty of rural areas. It offers tourists a place to immerse themselves in real and traditional experiences, boosting cultural interaction and appreciation. Rural tourism activities that promote local arts, crafts, and cuisines not only preserve traditional knowledge but also offer revenue and employment opportunities for local residents living in villages. Rural tourism is reported to have the ability to strengthen and promote traditional culture, which can turn into a simple idea commonly offered to tourists through knowledge and experience. Rural tourism programmes in rural areas offered a number of potential benefits, including greater employment, a broader economic base, social development, and a revival of native arts.

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) designated 2020 as a year of "Tourism and Rural Development" as most countries throughout the world turn to tourism to encourage economic recovery, particularly in rural areas where tourism is a key employer and economic pillar. The importance of rural tourism in the tourism sector has grown in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as tourists seek less congested sites and open-air experiences and activities. Tourism in the aforementioned rural areas provided significant opportunities for tourists to enhance their experience of visiting rural destinations in the countryside.

The goal of sustainability in rural tourism destinations is illusive; it is unclear as a goal for future growth in these rural tourism destinations. Sustainable tourism factors should be considered for the long-term stability and attractiveness of the village tourism destinations. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has recently created a draft tourism policy that includes a plan for rural tourism, which is a

positive step in terms of its acknowledgment and importance among officials and industry partners across the country.

Rural tourism has emerged as a systematic and promising alternative for local communities, particularly when created from the ground as a bottom up approach. Kumarakom's Responsible Tourism effort has made significant contributions to destination development by expanding the tourism resource base through village life experience programmes, the PEPPER initiative, and the STREET initiative. Responsible tourism definitely achieved its objective in Kumarakom and the success of the village destination gained the attention of the policy makers and potential visitors in the country and worldwide. The Responsible Tourism Mission performed an excellent job of developing community-industry linkages in Kumarakom that did not exist previous to responsible tourism intervention. Tourism and hospitality businesses can now easily contact residents in order to refer their clients to the Village Life Experience programme. Local communities of the village are able to sell their agricultural produce at a higher price.

The outcome of the study shed light on the varied implications of tourism on the local communities in their villages. First, in terms of social implications, it was revealed that the communities' has varied responses. While tourism brought opportunities for cultural exchange, better infrastructure, and increased social cohesiveness, there were also challenges related to cultural commodification, loss of traditional practices. Thus, it is crucial for tourism stakeholders to engage in responsible practices that respect and empower the local communities.

The communities' responses to the economic implications of tourism differed. Tourism was identified as an important source of revenue and job creation, notably in the hospitality and service sectors. However, there were worries regarding income leakage, unequal distribution of economic gains, and seasonality of tourism. To address these challenges, it is critical to adopt measures that support community-based tourism activities, foster local entrepreneurship, and ensure equitable distribution of economic benefits.

Rural tourism has been found to serve an important role in the preservation of arts, crafts, and culture. The communities recognized the importance of their traditional history and worked hard to showcase their arts, crafts, and cultural practices to tourists. This aided in the preservation and promotion of the host villages intangible and physical cultural treasures. It is critical to continue supporting and expanding efforts that encourage cultural preservation, give local artists market access, and establish opportunities for cultural exchange. Finally, the study looked into how host communities may participate in rural tourism activities. Community involvement was deemed essential for long-term tourism growth. The communities indicated a need for capacity building, resource access, participation in decision-making processes, and cooperation with tourist organizations. Encouragement of community engagement may result in a sense of ownership, greater benefits, and the creation of tourism goods that represent real local experiences.