

Village Life Experience (VLE) as A Tourism Product- An Analytical Study on Village Tourism at Kumbalangi, Kerala

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Abstract

In Kerala, tourism and its scope is very wide. The interests and preferences of tourists are changing day by day. The facilities and circumstances are also revised in tune with these changes. Recently, rural tourism shows an increasing growth in Kerala tourism. The unexplored natural environment of villages with its own serene character attract tourist to stay and experience the village life. Thus structured tourism packages were developed in Villages to attract potential tourists towards village tourism. Kumbalangi is one among such villages situated in Ernakulam having beautiful backwaters and natural beauty. The paper focuses on the VLE packages offered at Kumbalangi and the Village Life Experience (VLE) of tourists.

KEYWORDS-Village Tourism, Village Life Experience (VLE).

INTRODUCTION

Kerala has a mesmerising place in the world tourism map. Kerala's blessing nature; arts, culture and tradition are the major attracting factors leading tourists to visit Kerala. Environment friendly circumstances are needed for sustainable tourism development. For this purpose, peoples' participation is essential. It is the base of Responsible Tourism. Kumarakom, Thekkady, Kovalam and Vythiri were the first four destinations where Responsible Tourism was experimented on a pilot basis. It served as a model for the entire country. As the second phase, the project was expanded to Kumbalangi, Ambalavayal and Bekal. The project's immense popularity, overwhelming support and many accolades garnered led to the formation of the Responsible Tourism Mission, a nodal agency under the Department of Tourism which was created in 2017 with the sole aim of implementing RT activities across the state. Kumbalangi is a beautiful village which is essentially a fishing hamlet. This tiny village faces the Kochi backwaters, in the western part of the city and is the first eco friendly tourist village in India. It offers a chance to experience, explore, observe, discover, interact with and learn about the unique culture and community of Kerala rural villages. This study focuses on the satisfaction level of tourists towards Village Life Experience (VLE) packages offered at Kumbalangi. The paper also attempts to assess the major packages at Kumbalangi like visiting Chinese nets, crab farm, coir making, toddy tapping, copra making, weaving coconut leaves, country boating, pottery making and fishing.

Objective

- To assess the satisfaction level of tourists towards Village Life Experience (VLE) at Kumbalangi Village.

Methodology

For the purpose of the study, both primary data and secondary data are used. Primary data is collected from 50 representative sample conveniently selected among the tourists consisting 25 domestic and 25 foreign tourists who visited Kumablangi Village during the period of survey. Secondary data are collected from journals, publications of Department of Tourism, brochures etc.

Significance of the study

The emergence of tourism as a major industry is one of the most remarkable changes that have taken place in the global economic activity (Sinclair, 1998). Tourism is the third largest economic activity in the world (after oil and automobiles), and it is one of the fastest-growing activities (Batta, 2009). Receipts from tourism make an important contribution to the economies of the developing countries in terms of income, employment, and favourable balance of payments effects. Because of this, many developing countries had begun to pursue actively tourism as a means to create jobs, diversify their economies, and earn foreign currency. With the focus on the economic benefits that accompanied the development of tourism, the adverse socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism were relatively ignored. Based on the economic benefits, tourism development was prescribed as a panacea for many social and economic problems. This led to the indiscriminate and unplanned growth of tourism infrastructure in many countries, and soon the negative effects in the form of social and environmental degradation began to emerge. Due to enhanced awareness of the negative impact of tourism on the environment, efforts have been made to develop approaches for making tourism sustainable.

Kerala positions itself as a global destination for tourism based on the advantage of the local resources, thereby attracting investment and resulting in sustainable development for the people of Kerala. An equable climate, a long shoreline with serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, lush hill stations and exotic wildlife, waterfalls, sprawling plantations and paddy fields, ayurvedic health holidays, enchanting art forms, magical festivals, historical and cultural monuments, exotic cuisine - make Kerala a unique experience for all. One of the initiatives to take care of unexplored destinations is rural tourism. Village Life Experience packages are provided to tourists who have the intention to experience the real remote village life.

Results and Discussion

The profile of the sample is given below

Table 1: Sample Profile of Tourists

Basis of classification	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Type of tourists	Domestic	25	50
	Foreign	25	50
	Total	50	100
Gender	Male	24	48
	Female	26	52
	Total	50	100
Type of accommodation selected by tourists	Resorts	8	16
	Hotels	12	24
	Home stays	30	60

	Total	50	100
Source of information about the destination	Websites of Kerala tourism	22	44
	Website of travel agencies	12	24
	Friends	6	12
	Advertisement	7	14
	Social media	3	6
	Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

For the purpose of the study 25 domestic tourists and 25 foreign tourists are conveniently selected. Among them 48% is male and 52% is female. Accommodation units are classified as resorts, hotels and homestays. Resorts are least preferred by the tourists visiting Kumbalangi village. In order to experience village life 60% of the tourists under study preferred homestays. It means village life experience packages attracts tourists by staying in homestays in respected village. The responses show that 44% of the tourists depended website of Kerala tourism as a source of information to visit Kerala. Based on the information provided, websites of travel agencies have second place. Tourism department through its website update information relating to destinations thereby help both domestic and foreign tourists to know with current updates.

Reasons for choosing the destination

Tourists who visited Kumbalangi village are asked to rank the reasons for choosing this destination using eight variables as reasons. They are directed to mark their preferences from one to eight. On the basis of mean ranks reasons are ranked as follows.

As the reasons for selecting the destination are done based on preferences, lower the mean score higher will be the preference assigned to the variables. Thus based on ranks, it is found that VLE packages are the major attraction at Kumbalangi with the lowest mean rank and is ranked first. Backwater has second lowest mean rank value and ranked second. Natural beauty of Kumbalangi village is another reason for choosing this destination and it is ranked third. Climatic condition of Kumbalangi village, undisturbed character of this village, homestays, food and beverages and host community are other reasons to visit Kumbalangi village which are ranked 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th ranks respectively based on mean rank values.

Table 2: Mean ranks based on preferences assigned to Reasons for selecting Kumbalangi Village as destination

No	Reasons	Total rank value	Mean Rank	Rank
1	Climatic condition	247	4.94	4
2	Natural beauty	148	2.96	3
3	Backwater	143	2.86	2
4	VLE package	89	1.78	1
5	Undisturbed place	281	5.62	5
6	Home stays	284	5.68	6
7	Food and beverages	295	5.90	7
8	Host community	338	6.76	8

Source: Primary Data

Level of satisfaction with the packages

Tourists who visited Kumbalangi village is asked to rate the level of satisfaction with regards to the packages provided at the village. Rating is done in five point scale which gives 5 for highly satisfied and 1 for not at all satisfied. There are mainly nine packages are provided at Kumbalangi village. On the basis of total rates variables are arranged as follows.

Table3: Table Showing Satisfaction Level of Tourists towards VLE Packages at Kumbalangi

No	VLE packages at kumbalangi	Highly Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	No Opinion	Satisfied	Highly Satisfied	Total Score	Mean Score
1	Visiting chinese nets	0(0)	0(0)	5(10)	10(20)	35(70)	230	4.6
2	Crab farm	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	5(10)	45(90)	245	4.9
3	Coir making	0(0)	0(0)	14(28)	6(12)	30(60)	216	4.32
4	Toddy tapping	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	10(20)	40(80)	240	4.8
5	Copra making	0(0)	0(0)	10(20)	10(20)	30(60)	220	4.4
6	Weaving coconut leaves	0(0)	0(0)	10(20)	12(24)	28(56)	218	4.36
7	Country boating	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	10(20)	40(80)	240	4.8
8	Fishing	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	11(22)	39(78)	239	4.78
9	Pottery making	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	13(26)	37(74)	237	4.74

Source: Primary Data

From the table 3 it can be inferred that for all variables of VLE packages, the mean score is above the median score of 3, that indicates that tourists are satisfied with all VLE packages. A comparison of mean scores within the variables will help to locate the most satisfying experiences. Thus, Visiting crab farm is rated top among other VL experience packages with a mean score of 4.9; It is followed by toddy tapping (4.80); country boating (4.80), fishing(4.78), pottery making(4.74), visiting Chinese nets(4.60), copra making(4.40), weaving coconut leaves (4.36) and coir making(4.32). Since the mean difference between variables are very small it can also been inferred that all variables significantly contribute equally to the satisfaction level of the visiting tourists at Kumbalangi Village.

Overall satisfaction towards Village Tourism

Tourists who visited Kumbalangi village are asked to rate their overall satisfaction level towards Village Tourism at Kumbalangi. Rating is done on a five point scale which gives 5 for highly satisfied and 1 Highly Dissatisfied. The table indicating the frequencies and total score is given below.

Table 4: Table showing the overall satisfaction level of tourists towards Village Tourism

Satisfaction Rating	Frequency	Rating value
Highly satisfied (5)	35 (70)	175
Satisfied(4)	10(20)	40
Neutral(3)	5(10)	15
Not satisfied(2)	0(0)	0

Not at all satisfied(1)	0(0)	0
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Source : Primary Data

The table 4 shows that 70% of the tourists under survey are highly satisfied with Village Tourism at Kumbalangi with a highest rating (175); 20% of the tourists are satisfied with a total rating of 40 and the rest shows their opinion as neutral This result shows majority of the tourists visited Kumbalangi during the period of survey have high level of satisfaction towards Village Tourism at Kumbalangi.

Difficulties in VLE

Respondents were asked to rate the difficulties if any facing during the time of Village life experience in five point scale. For this purpose 6 variables are selected. From the 50 respondents each was asked whether they face difficulty during their village life and if any rate the difficulty giving values 5 for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree.

Table 5: Table showing Problems in Village Life Experience (VLE) of tourists

No	Problems	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree	Total score	Mean score
1	Lack of facilities	12(24)	36(72)	0(0)	1(2)	1(2)	93	1.86
2	Limited accommodation units	16(32)	32(64)	1(2)	1(2)	0(0)	87	1.74
3	Over pricing/ over charging	8(16)	32(64)	3(6)	5(10)	2(4)	111	2.22
4	Deviation from offers	5(10)	41(82)	1(2)	2(4)	1(2)	103	2.06
5	Difficulty in accessibility	13(26)	26(52)	4(8)	6(12)	1(2)	106	2.12
6	Non completion of package	8(16)	34(68)	5(10)	3(6)	0(0)	103	2.06

Source: Primary Data

Overpricing or over charging for packages is one issue faced by some of the tourists visited Kumbalangi village (mean score 2.22) followed by difficulty in accessibility to the destination(2.12);deviation from others (2.06); non completion of package(2.06); lack of facilities(1.84) and .Limited accommodation units(1.74). It is important to note that only a very small proportion of sample under study face these difficulties during their village life experience since all mean scores are less than the median score of 3.

FINDINGS

1. For the purpose of the study 25 domestic tourists and 25 foreign tourists are selected. Among them 48% of the population is male and 52% is female.
2. Accommodation units are classified as resorts, hotels and homestays. Resorts are least preferred by the tourists visiting Kumbalangi village. In order to experience village life 60% of the tourists under study preferred homestays. It means village life experience packages attracts tourists by staying in homestays in respective village to experience village life. The opinions of the tourists show that home stays are the best option to enjoy village life.

3. The responses show that 44% of the tourists depended website of Kerala tourism as a source of information to visit Kerala. Based on the information provided, websites of travel agencies have second place. Tourism department through its website update information relating to destinations thereby helping both domestic and foreign tourists to know updates. Website of Kerala Tourism is used widely as a source of information about Kumbalangi and websites of Travel agencies also have a role in providing information.
4. Based on mean ranks, it is found that VLE packages are the major attraction at Kumbalangi with the lowest mean rank indicating first preference. Backwater has second lowest mean rank value and ranked second. Natural beauty of Kumbalangi village is another reason for choosing this destination and it is ranked third. Climatic condition of Kumbalangi village, undisturbed character of this village, homestays, food and beverages and host community are other reasons to visit Kumbalangi village ranked respectively as fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth ranks.
5. From the opinion of tourists it is noted that visiting crab farm, toddy tapping and country boating have highest level of satisfaction as these three show highest rating values which means a highest satisfaction level. Fishing, pottery making, Visiting Chinese nets, copra making, weaving coconut leaves and coir making also shows rating values between 4 and 5. Nobody is seemed as not satisfied and values below 3.
6. Overall satisfaction level to Village Tourism is very high. The results show 70% of the tourists under study are highly satisfied with Village Life at Kumbalangi as these have highest mean rating value; 20% of the tourists are satisfied with Village Tourism at Kumbalangi and the rest indicates their opinion as neutral. The result shows majority of the tourists visited Kumbalangi during their time of stay are highly satisfied with the Village Tourism at Kumbalangi.
7. Overpricing or over charging for packages is one issue faced by a small percentage of the tourists visited Kumbalangi village. It is followed by difficulty in accessibility to the destination with a mean score of 2.12. Deviation from offers and non completion of package show equal mean score. Limited accommodation unit is scored least among other variables. It is important to note that a very small proportion under study face difficulties during their village life.

CONCLUSION

Kerala has been naturally endowed with a range of boons and bounties. The rural areas have avoided the ravages of industrialisation and maintained their pristine charm. They offer a serene experience that travelers are drawn to. These are precious diamonds that shine brighter with each passing day. All who visit these charming villages cherish them with all their heart. Village tourism is becoming more attractive than ever in recent days, unexplored nature with its real character is the trend of rural tourism. That is the reason for the tremendous growth of rural village tourism and tourists visiting such villages. VLE packages are developed to support the tourism and to offer a chance to experience, explore, observe, discover, interact with and learn about the unique culture and community of Kerala in rural villages.

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