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**A STUDY ON BACKWATER TOURIST'S PREFERENCE RELATING TO
SERVICES OFFERED WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KUMARAKOM
BACKWATER TOURISM.**

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Abstract

Tourism industry has moved to be the one of the major source of income to India and going through a significant phase of growth and development. The growth in Indian tourism industry both in terms of Tourist arrival and foreign exchange earnings is remarkable. Tourism is promoted by the government both state and national level because it supposedly contributes to creating wealth at the national and local levels, maintain and preserve the heritage and historical monuments which would otherwise have fallen into rapid dilapidation. It projected tourism as an engine of economic growth and an instrument for eliminating poverty, solving unemployment problem, opening up new fields of activity and the uplifting status of livelihood of the people. Travel on backwater cruises in Kerala is an experience of a delightful journey to a land where earth, sea and sky come together in harmony. Backwater cruises in Kerala are carried out in large converted traditional boats called "Kettuvallams". Success of backwater depends upon

the level of facilities available in the houseboat. Therefore, the study is based on “A study on backwater tourist’s preference relating to services offered with special reference to Kumarakom backwater tourism. This study examined, whether the service components and the level of preference among the both male and female tourists for backwater tourism in Kumarakom backwater tourism This study also examined the level of satisfaction and the gender factor. This study concluded that the preference on selecting Kumarakom as a destination for backwater tourism by the tourists purely based on the services offered to the tourists and does not contain any gender influence in selecting the backwater tourism. It also concluded that the level of satisfaction among both male and female have no association.

Key words: *Back water tourism, service components.*

Tourism in Kerala

Tourism is travel for pleasure; also the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, and the business of operating tours. Tourism may be international, or within the traveler's country. The ¹World Tourism Organization defines tourism more generally, in terms which go "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only ", as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes".

Since its incorporation as a state, Kerala's economy largely operated under welfare-based democratic socialist principles. This mode of development, though it resulted in a high Human Development Index and standard of living among the people, led to an economic stagnation in the 1980s. By 1986, tourism had gained an industry status. Kerala Tourism subsequently adopted the tagline God's Own Country in its advertisement campaigns. Aggressive promotion in print and electronic media were able to invite a sizable investment in the hospitality industry. By the early 2000s, tourism had grown into a full-fledged, multi-billion dollar industry in the state. The state was able to carve a niche for itself in the world tourism industry, thus becoming one of the places with the "highest brand recall". In 2003, Kerala, a hitherto unknown tourism destination, became the fastest growing tourist destination in the world.

¹"UNWTO technical manual: Collection of Tourism Expenditure Statistics"(PDF).World Tourism Organization. 1995. p. 10. Retrieved 26 March 2009.

2.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/tourism_in_kerala

Today, ² growing at a rate of 13.31%, Kerala is one of the most visited tourism destinations in India .

Backwater tourism in Kerala

Backwaters of Kerala are a series of interconnected waterways, lakes, inlets and revering estuaries that form an intermeshed network along the coast of Kerala, India. The local people of the Kerala backwaters, travel on these waters and carry out their traditional occupations, such as farming and fishing on its fertile banks. The scenic beauty of the backwaters has also led to its being developed as a tourist destination in recent times. Travelling in the backwater cruise is very enjoyable. The Kerala backwaters are a chain of brackish lagoons and lakes lying parallel to the Arabian Sea coast of Kerala state in southern India. The backwaters have a unique ecosystem - fresh water from the rivers meets the sea water from the Arabian Sea. Backwater cruises in Kerala are carried out in large converted traditional boats. These boats called "Kettuvallams" along the Kerala Backwaters.

Kettuvallam

Kettuvallam is a houseboat widely used in the Indian state of Kerala. These have thatched roof covers over wooden hulls. The traditional kettuvallam is mainly used for promoting tourism. In the Malayalam language "kettu" means "to tie" and "vallam" means boat – the two together make the local name "kettuvallam". Each houseboat is constructed using the ancient principles and techniques of boat building by the local carpenters using 'Anjili' wood. Coir ropes are used for tightening the wooden planks together.

A kettuvallam is about 100 feet in length and has a width of around 13 feet in the middle. The materials that go into the making are local and ecofriendly; bamboo poles, coconut fibre, ropes, bamboo mats, carpets etc. The main wood used is "Anjili" (*Artocarpus Hirsuta*). There are houseboats with fully furnished single room, double room and triple rooms.

The kettuvallam was designed to transport cargo and as such, many design changes had to be made to make it a tourist vehicle. The height of the roof was increased to get sufficient headroom. A plank was laid all through the length for ease of walking and comfortable seating, to reduce the disadvantages of the curved shape of the hull. Windows and other openings were provided for

light, airflow and view. The entrance is provided in the centre of the linear axis with a top hung pane

Review of literature

- Vijayakumar (1995) highlighted the importance of eco tourism and assessed the demand for the same in Kerala. This study, confined to foreign tourists, has succeeded in establishing empirically the fact that the natural beauty of Kerala, rather than the man-made one attracts the foreign tourists. Applying the technique of Delphi, he substantiated the claim of Kerala on its immense potential with respect to eco-tourism.
- Kumar (1998) conducted a study on foreign tourists visiting Kerala to find out the influences of their demographic profiles on the selection of Kerala as a destination and found that the psychological factors have influenced their visit and spending pattern during their visit.
- Government of Kerala (GOK, 2001a) outlined the Tourism Vision 2025 and noted the action plan to achieve a ten percent increase in earnings from tourism with seven percent growth in foreign and nine percent growth in domestic tourist arrivals and hoped to create 10,000 job opportunities every year. It proposed to promote and market Kerala tourism products at the national and imitational levels thereby making the state a premier global tourist destination.

Statement of the Problem

Houseboat tourism is not only considered as one of the major attraction of Kerala tourism but also the main source of investment into the country. Therefore, the study is based on “A *study on backwater tourist’s preference relating to services offered with special reference to Kumarakom backwater tourism*. For this purpose, the data has been collected from tourist both domestic and foreigners who had visited Kumarakom.

Scope of the study

The study is predominantly analytical in nature, which gives a bird’s eye view of this sector. The study area is limited to the political limits of Kerala state and is focused on that part of geographical region known as the coastal plains of Kerala. The focus of this study is predominantly to trace the development and potential for coastal tourism, the economic and environmental impacts of coastal tourism and to suggest a strategy for the sustainable development of beach tourism and backwater tourism in Kerala. It is also worthwhile to note that

the major focus of the study was to look at the economic impact of visiting tourists from outside the state and it has not considered the impact of travel expenditure and other expenses of residents and the 'same day visitors'.

Objectives of the study

- To know the significant difference between various service and the preference of services among the tourists.
- To analyze the level of satisfaction among the tourists visited in Kumarakom backwater tourism.

Research Methodology

Through this study, we would like to analyze, how far the tourist, both male and female are satisfied with the facilities available in the backwater tourism with special reference to Kumarakom backwater tourism. Tourists take into account the various factors in terms of facilities, local attractions etc. before choosing their destination. Absence of any of these facilities may affect the tourist from travelling to enjoy the attractions of backwaters in Kerala.

Area of the study

Kumarakom is an important tourist destination in India. The Backwaters of Kumarakom are the most popular tourist attraction in Kerala. A houseboat cruise in these backwaters can be booked.

Kumarakom Back Waters

Kerala is known for its panoramic backwater stretches, lush green paddy fields, highlands and beaches. A major backwater stretch lies in Kottayam district, where a network of rivers and canals empty into the great expanse of water called the Vembanad Lake. Located at Kumarakom 16 km from Kottayam town, the Vembanad Lake, an enchanting picnic spot and a fast developing backwater tourism destination, offers boating, fishing and sightseeing experiences that are truly exhilarating. Kumarakom is a serenely beautiful and scenic backwater destination, a charming peninsula jutting into the ever-effervescent Vembanad Lake that is dotted with plenty of traditional rice boats and canoes, leaving a scene that is immensely pleasing to the eye .

Data required

For conducting the study primary data are used. Primary data are collected through questionnaire method. Samples of 50 respondents were selected from male and female tourist visited Kumarakom.

Sample size & Sampling method

Sample size is fixed as 50 respondents. 30 male and 20 female were selected. For the purpose of the study, convenience sampling method was used.

Hypothesis

1. H₀: there is no association between various services offered and the preference of services among the male and female tourists.
H₁: there is association between various services offered and the preference of services among the male and female tourists.
2. H₀: there is no association between level of satisfaction and the gender factor.
H₁: there is association between level of satisfaction and the gender factor.

Various Services provided by backwater tourism

For the purpose of the study, the services provided by the backwater tourism are classified as:

1. Recreational and entertainment.
2. Food and beverages.
3. Accommodation and safety.

Tools for hypothesis testing

Chi square test were used to test the hypothesis.

Data analysis an interpretation

The study was conducted among 50 respondents consisting of 30 male and 20 female tourists who visited in Kumarakom.

Testing of hypothesis- I

H₀: there is no association between various services offered and the preference of services among the male and female tourists.

H1: there is association between various services offered and the preference of services among the male and female tourists.

Table1.1 Showing observed frequency for service preferences by the Male and Female

Particulars	Recreational & Entertainment	Food & Beverages	Accommodation & Safety	Total
Male	8	17	5	30
Female	5	11	4	20
Total	9	33	8	50

Table1.2 Showing expected frequency for service preferences by the Male and Female

Particulars	Recreational & Entertainment	Food & Beverages	Accommodation & Safety	Total
Male	7.8	16.8	5.4	30
Female	5.20	11.2	3.6	20
Total	9	33	8	50

Table 1.3 showing the result of chi-square

Calculated value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
0.0928	3	5%

Inference:

Since, the calculated chi-square value is within the acceptable limits, so we accept the null hypothesis. That is there is no association between gender factor and the level of preference among the tourists.

Testing of hypothesis- II

H₀: there is no association between level of satisfaction and the gender factor.

H₁: there is association between level of satisfaction and the gender factor.

Chi-square test**Table1.4 Showing observed frequency for level of satisfaction by the Male and Female**

Particulars	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Unsatisfied	Total
Male	16	10	3	1	30
Female	8	7	4	1	20
Total	24	17	7	2	50

Table1.5 Showing expected frequency for level of satisfaction by the Male and Female

Particulars	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Unsatisfied	Total
Male	14.4	10.2	4.2	1.2	30
Female	9.6	6.8	2.8	0.8	20
Total	24	17	7	2	50

Table 1.6 showing the result of chi-square

Calculated value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
1.3947	3	5%

Inference:

Since, the calculated chi-square value is within the acceptable limits, so we accept the null hypothesis. That is there is no association between level of satisfaction and gender factor.

Findings, suggestions and conclusion

The study was conducted among 50 respondents consisting of 30 male and 20 female.

This study examined, whether the service components and the level of preference among the both male and female tourists for backwater tourism in Kumarakom backwater tourism. The result of this study shows that there is no association between various services offered and the preference among both male and female tourists.

This study also examined the level of satisfaction and the gender factor. The result of this objective shows that, there is no association between level of satisfaction and gender factor.

This study does not considered the other dominant factors such as age, income of the family, family size, educational qualifications, parents and peers, residential status, government policy etc which have a relative role in preference and satisfaction related to backwater tourism. This study suggested that there is a wide scope of conducting a detailed research on this area.

This study concluded that the preference on selecting Kumarakom as a destination for backwater tourism by the tourists purely based on the services offered to the tourists and does not contain any gender influence in selecting the backwater tourism. It also concluded that the level of satisfaction among both male and female have no association.

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