



Development of Eco-Tourism and Satisfaction of Domestic Tourists: A Study in Palakkad District

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates ecotourism development and satisfaction of domestic tourists towards eco-tourism spots in Palakkad District. Eco-tourism development influences pro-environmental behaviours. Results shows that domestic tourists give importance to environmental quality, local community engagement and authentic cultural experiences. Eco-tourism development initiatives such as sustainable accommodations and eco-friendly activities positively influences tourist satisfaction. Infrastructure limitations and inadequate waste management were negatively influencing the overall experience. Change in the quality of life of local residents, income generation and opportunity to interact with different people are the major socio-economic benefits of eco-tourism spots. Infrastructure development, employment generation are the next significant socio-economic benefits of ecotourism spots. The study found that destruction of nature and habitat loss, infrastructure strain, environmental impacts, balancing the interests of local people, loss of cultural identity of the place and community and illegal activities are the major difficulties in the development of eco-tourism. Seasonal imbalances and climate change vulnerability are not much serious difficulty in the development of eco-tourism. The study concluded

with majority of the respondents are satisfied in the visited eco-tourism spots. This study informs eco-tourism stakeholders and policy makers on domestic tourist preferences and concerns, highlighting the need for sustainable practices, community engagement and effective management.

Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that focuses on responsible travel to natural areas while conserving the environment and improving the well-being of local communities. Palakkad district, located in the southern Indian state of Kerala, is blessed with abundant natural beauty, including lush forests, picturesque hills, and diverse wildlife. Among its notable ecotourism destinations are Nelliampathy, Anangamala, and the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. These areas offer visitors unique experiences such as trekking through dense forests, encountering exotic flora and fauna, and enjoying breath-taking views of cascading waterfalls. However, despite their potential, the development of ecotourism in Palakkad faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited awareness, and insufficient promotion. The study aims to delve into the perception of domestic tourists towards ecotourism in Palakkad district, with a special focus on Nelliampathy, Anangamala, and the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. This study is crucial as there is a lack of comprehensive research on ecotourism in Palakkad, making it essential to understand the perceptions and experiences of tourists to support sustainable development in the region.

Review of Literature

Shri. Suresh Kumar (2020): The work focused on the role of government policies in promoting sustainable ecotourism. His research advocated for the formulation of comprehensive policies that strike a balance between tourism promotion and environmental conservation.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad (2012): The research delved into the cultural aspects of ecotourism, emphasizing the rich heritage of Palakkad. He advocated for a holistic approach that incorporates cultural sensitivity, allowing tourists to forge meaningful connections with the destination.

Prof. Lakshmi Nair (2010): The seminal work underscored the importance of community involvement in ecotourism. Her research illuminated the positive impact of local participation, fostering a sense of responsibility among domestic tourists to preserve the ecological balance.

Dr. Viswanathan Iyer (2008): Dr. Iyer, a luminary in the field of environmental studies, highlighted the symbiotic relationship between tourists and nature. His work emphasized the need for sustainable practices in ecotourism to ensure the longevity of Palakkad's natural beauty.

Swarbrooke, J., & Horner, S. (2007): This collaborative work provides insights into the management and marketing of eco-tourism destinations. The authors stress the need to align tourist perceptions with the environmental goals of the destination.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the socio-economic benefits of Eco-tourism.
2. To analyse the major difficulties for the development of Eco-tourism in Palakkad.
3. To identify the level of satisfaction of tourists on Eco-tourism.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problems. It includes the overall research design, the sampling procedure, data collection and analysis procedure. Descriptive research design is used for the study. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. For collecting the primary data. A convenient sample of tourists were well selected and their opinion were collected through well-structured questionnaire which was specially prepared for the study. Secondary data needed for the study is collected from various websites, published documents, journals...etc. The population of the study constitutes all tourists in Palakkad District. Among the population 53 tourists from Palakkad District were taken as sample who were visited Eco-tourism spots such as Ananganmala, Nelliampathy, and Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. For selecting the sample non-probability sampling method is used for the study. Among the non-probability sampling method, convenient sampling method and snowball sampling method is used for the study. The collected data were analysed through various statistical tools such as weighted mean score, percentage analysis, chart, graphs and diagrams.

Theoretical Framework

Eco-Tourism in India

The country is blessed with an abundance of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and ecologically significant areas, fostering a thriving environment for nature-based tourism. One of the key attractions of ecotourism in India lies in its ability to offer visitors an immersive experience in unspoiled natural settings. From the pristine landscapes of the Western Ghats to the exotic biodiversity of the

Sundarbans, ecotourism endeavours aim to strike a delicate balance between satisfying the wanderlust of travellers and conserving the ecological integrity of these areas.

Eco-Tourism in Kerala

Eco-tourism in Kerala is like exploring nature's wonderland! Nestled in the lush greenery of South India, Kerala offers a unique blend of adventure and conservation. Imagine wandering through pristine forests, cruising along serene backwaters, and encountering vibrant wildlife.

The Eco-Tourism Industry in Kerala Can Be Classified on The Basis of Different Types of Eco-Tourism

- **Wildlife Ecotourism:** Kerala is home to several wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. Wildlife ecotourism focuses on promoting responsible tourism in these areas to observe and appreciate the diverse flora and fauna. Some popular destinations for wildlife ecotourism in Kerala include Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, Silent Valley National Park, and Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary
- **Forest Ecotourism:** This type of ecotourism revolves around the exploration of Kerala's lush green forests. It involves activities like trekking, bird watching, and camping. Visitors can experience the unique ecosystems of the Western Ghats, which are rich in biodiversity. The forests in areas like Munnar and Wayanad offer excellent opportunities for forest ecotourism.
- **Beach Ecotourism:** Kerala has a long coastline with serene beaches. Beach ecotourism focuses on sustainable tourism practices along the coast, promoting activities such as responsible beach recreation, conservation of marine ecosystems, and community engagement. Kovalam and Varkala are popular destinations for beach ecotourism.
- **Agro-Ecotourism:** Kerala is known for its lush landscapes and agricultural practices. Agro-ecotourism focuses on providing visitors with insights into sustainable farming methods, organic cultivation, and traditional agricultural practices. Tourists may stay in farmhouses, participate in farming activities, and learn about local agricultural traditions.
- **Mountain Ecotourism:** With the Western Ghats running through Kerala, mountain ecotourism emphasizes exploring the hilly terrains, promoting activities like trekking, mountaineering, and nature walks. Destinations like Munnar and Ponmudi are popular for mountain ecotourism.
- **Waterfall Ecotourism:** Kerala is dotted with beautiful waterfalls, and waterfall ecotourism focuses on responsible tourism around these natural wonders. Tourists can enjoy the scenic beauty, engage in eco-friendly activities, and contribute to the conservation of these delicate ecosystems. Athirappilly and Vazhachal waterfalls are prominent examples.

The Various Eco-Tourism Locations in Nelliampathy:

- 1. Pothundi Dam & Reservoir:** The Pothundi Dam and Reservoir are prominent attractions in Nelliampathy. Surrounded by hills and greenery, it offers a serene environment for boating and a perfect spot for birdwatching. The dam is an excellent example of how man-made structures can harmonize with nature.
- 2. Tea Estates:**

Nelliampathy is renowned for its tea plantations, contributing to the region's economy while maintaining an eco-friendly approach. Tourists can take guided walks through the tea estates, learning about the tea-making process and enjoying panoramic views of the surrounding hills.
- 3. Seetharkundu Viewpoint:**

This viewpoint offers breath-taking panoramic views of the Palakkad Gap, which is a low mountain pass in the Western Ghats. The mist-covered mountains and lush valleys make it a prime spot for nature lovers and photographers.

Eco-Tourism in Ananganmala

Ananganmala Ecotourism stands as a beacon of sustainable travel and nature conservation. This hidden gem invites visitors to immerse themselves in the pristine beauty of the Western Ghats, fostering a deep connection with the environment.

Ananganmala is renowned for its rich biodiversity, showcasing a plethora of flora and fauna endemic to the region. The dense forests and meandering trails offer a unique opportunity for nature enthusiasts and wildlife lovers to witness the beauty of the Western Ghats.

Eco-Tourism in Parambikulam Tiger Reserve

Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, nestled in the Western Ghats of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, stands as a shining example of sustainable ecotourism. Spanning over 1,391 square kilometres, this reserve is a haven for biodiversity, featuring diverse flora and fauna, including the elusive Bengal tiger.

The Various Eco-Tourism Locations In Parambikulam Tiger Reserve:

- 1. Tree House:**

Parambikulam offers the chance to stay in tree house within the reserve, providing a truly immersive experience in the heart of nature. These tree houses are designed to minimize the impact on the environment while offering a comfortable stay.



2. **Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary:**

The sanctuary is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, including the Bengal tiger, Indian elephant, and several species of deer. Guided safaris and trekking expeditions allow visitors to explore the sanctuary while minimizing disturbance to the wildlife.

3. **Valley Viewpoint:**

This viewpoint offers breath-taking panoramic views of the surrounding valleys and hills. It's a great spot for nature enthusiasts and photographers to capture the beauty of the Western Ghats.

4. **Kannimara Teak Tree:**

Known as the world's largest teak tree, Kannimara is a must-visit attraction in Parambikulam. The tree is estimated to be around 450 years old and stands as a symbol of the region's rich natural heritage.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Eco-Tourism

Positive Socio-Economic Impacts:

1. **Job Creation and Employment Opportunities:** Ecotourism generates jobs for local communities, providing income and economic stability.
2. **Income Generation and Poverty Reduction:** Ecotourism revenue helps reduce poverty by providing alternative livelihoods for local communities.
3. **Cultural Preservation and Exchange:** Ecotourism promotes cultural exchange between tourists and local communities, preserving traditional practices and heritage.
4. **Community Development and Empowerment:** Ecotourism enables local communities to manage and benefit from tourism activities, fostering self-determination.
5. **Infrastructure Development:** Ecotourism investment leads to improved infrastructure, benefiting both tourists and local residents.

Negative Socio-Economic Impacts:

1. **Displacement and Loss of Land:** Unregulated ecotourism can lead to displacement of local communities and loss of ancestral lands
2. **Cultural Commodification and Exploitation:** Ecotourism can commercialize cultural practices, threatening their authenticity.



3. **Inequality and Uneven Distribution of Benefits:** Ecotourism benefits may not be evenly distributed, exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities.
4. **Over-Tourism and Strain on Local Resources:** Unmanaged ecotourism can strain local resources, infrastructure, and services.
5. **Dependence on Tourism and Vulnerability to Market Fluctuations:** Ecotourism reliance can make local economies vulnerable to market fluctuations and external factors.

Difficulties in the development of ecotourism

Economic Difficulties:

1. **High Initial Investment:** Establishing ecotourism infrastructure (e.g., lodges, trails) requires significant upfront costs.
2. **Limited Financial Resources:** Local communities may lack access to funding, grants, or loans to develop ecotourism initiatives.
3. **Seasonal Fluctuations:** Ecotourism revenue may be unpredictable due to seasonal variations in tourist numbers.

Environmental Difficulties:

1. **Conservation Challenges:** Balancing tourism with conservation goals can be difficult, particularly in fragile ecosystems.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Building ecotourism infrastructure without harming the environment is a significant challenge.
3. **Waste Management:** Managing waste generated by tourists can be problematic in remote or sensitive areas.

Social Difficulties:

1. **Community Engagement:** Ensuring local communities benefit from and participate in ecotourism decision-making can be challenging.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Managing tourist behavior to respect local customs and traditions is essential.

3. **Land Ownership and Access:** Resolving land ownership disputes and ensuring access for ecotourism development can be complicated.

Institutional Difficulties:

1. **Lack of Regulatory Frameworks:** Inadequate policies, laws, or enforcement mechanisms can hinder sustainable ecotourism development.

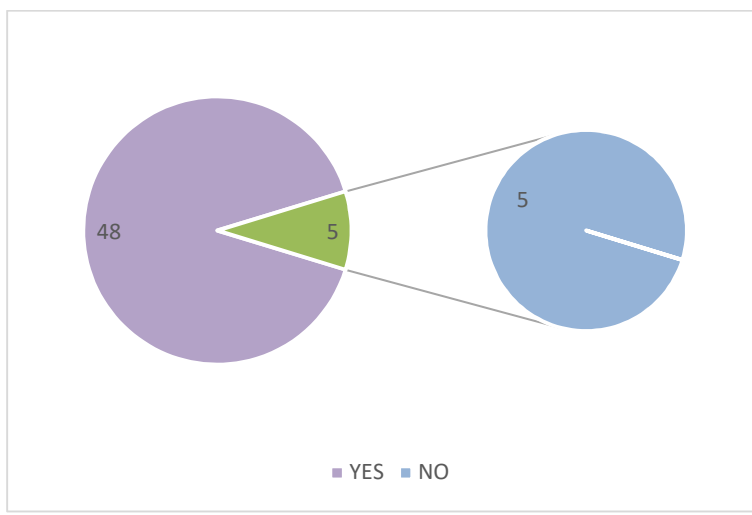
Results and Discussions

Table 1: Awareness About Ecotourism Spots

Awareness	Total no of respondents	Percentage
YES	48	91
NO	5	9
TOTAL	53	100

(Source: Primary Data)

FIGURE 1: Awareness About Ecotourism Spots



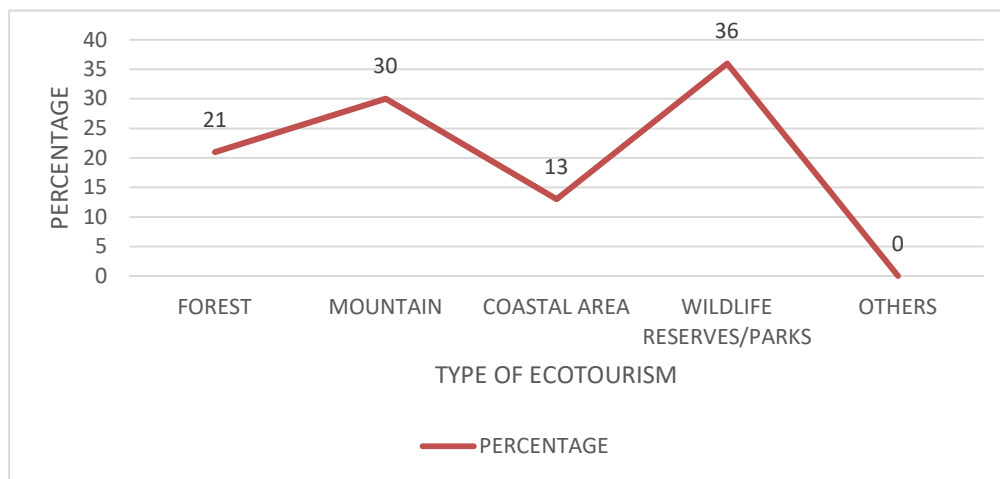
The above table and figure show that 91 percent of the respondents have awareness about all ecotourism spots in Palakkad district. Only 9 percent of the respondents are not aware about all the eco-tourism spots. So majority of the respondents have awareness about all ecotourism spots in Palakkad district.

Table 2: Preference Of Ecotourism Spots

Types	Total no of respondents	Percentage
Forests	11	21
Mountains	16	30
Coastal areas	7	13
Wildlife reserves/parks	19	36
Others	0	0
Total	53	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Figure 2: Preference Of Ecotourism Spots



The above table and figure shows that 36 percent of the respondents prefer wildlife reserves/parks and 30 percent of the respondents prefer mountain areas. 21 percent of the respondents prefer forests and only 13 percent of the respondents prefer coastal areas. So majority of the respondents prefer wildlife reserves/parks.

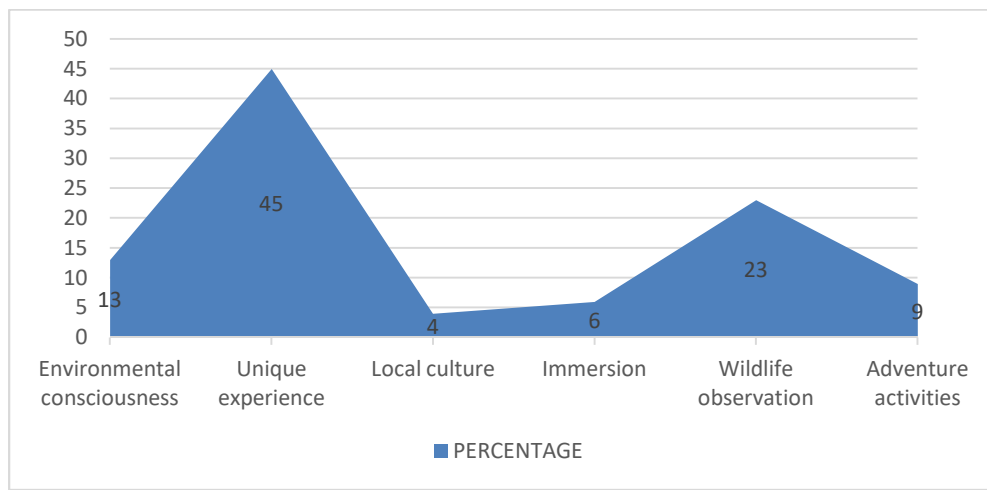
Table 3: Factors Considered In Choosing Ecotourism Spots

Factors	Total no of respondents	Percentage
Environmental consciousness	7	13
Unique experience	24	45

Local culture Immersion	5	10
Wildlife observation	12	23
Adventure activities	5	9
Total	53	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Figure 3: Factors Considered In Choosing Ecotourism Spots



The above table and figure show that 45 percent of the respondents consider the factor unique experience in choosing ecotourism spots. 23 percent of the respondents consider the factor wildlife observation and 13 percent of the respondents consider the factor environmental consciousness. Only 9 percent of the respondents consider the factor adventure activities in choosing ecotourism spots. So majority of the respondents prefer wildlife reserves/parks.

Table 4: Opinion About Various Aspects Of Ecotourism Experience

Aspects	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)	Weighted frequency	Weighted Average
Quality of accommodation	15	23	10	5	154	2.91

Tour guide	10	30	13	0	156	2.94
Transportation	10	28	12	3	151	2.85

(Source: Primary Data)

Figure 4: Opinion About Various Aspects Of Ecotourism Experience



The above table and figure show that quality of accommodation, tour guide and transportation are good in their ecotourism experience.

Table 5: Socio economic benefits of ecotourism

Socio economic benefits	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	WF	WA
Infrastructure development	10	21	10	8	4	184	3.47
Employment generation	10	18	14	8	3	183	3.45
Regional development	9	16	18	6	4	179	3.37

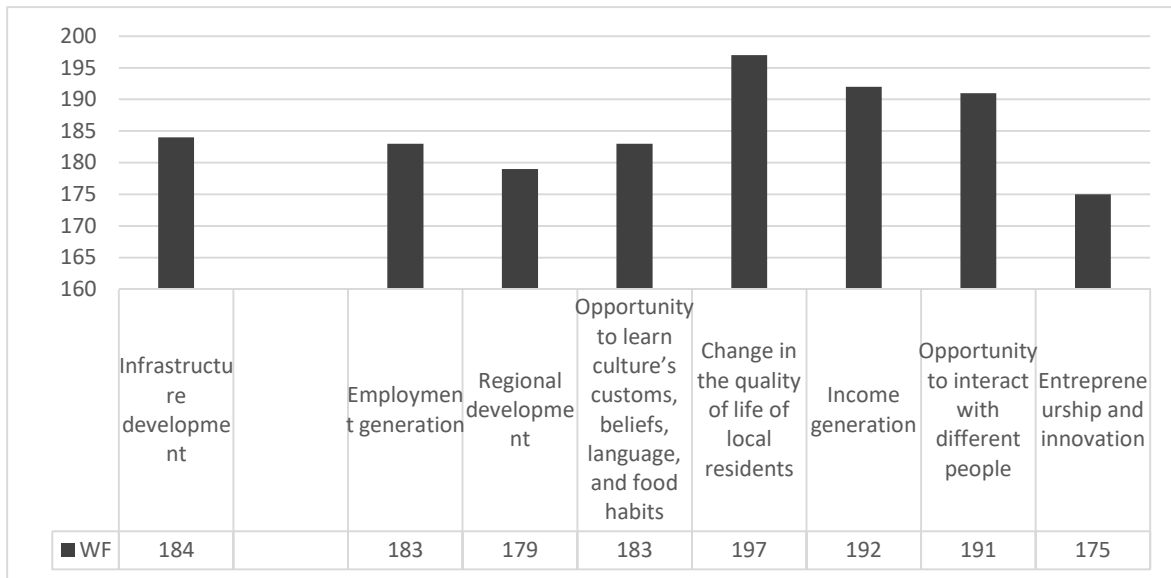


Opportunity to learn culture’s customs, beliefs, language, and food habits	9	22	11	6	5	183	3.45
Change in the quality of life of local residents	14	19	11	9	0	197	3.71
Income generation	9	23	13	8	0	192	3.62
Opportunity to interact with different people	10	18	19	6	0	191	3.60
Entrepreneurship and innovation	8	17	16	7	5	175	3.30

(Source: Primary Data)

(SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SDA= Strongly Disagree, WF= Weighted Frequency, WA= Weighted Average)

Figure 5: Socio economic benefits of ecotourism



The above table and figure show that change in the quality of life of local residents, income generation and opportunity to interact with different people are the major socio-economic benefits of eco-tourism spots. Infrastructure development, employment generation are the next significant socio-economic benefits of ecotourism spots. Entrepreneurship and innovation are the least significant socio-economic benefit of ecotourism spots.

Table 6: Difficulties For Development Of Ecotourism

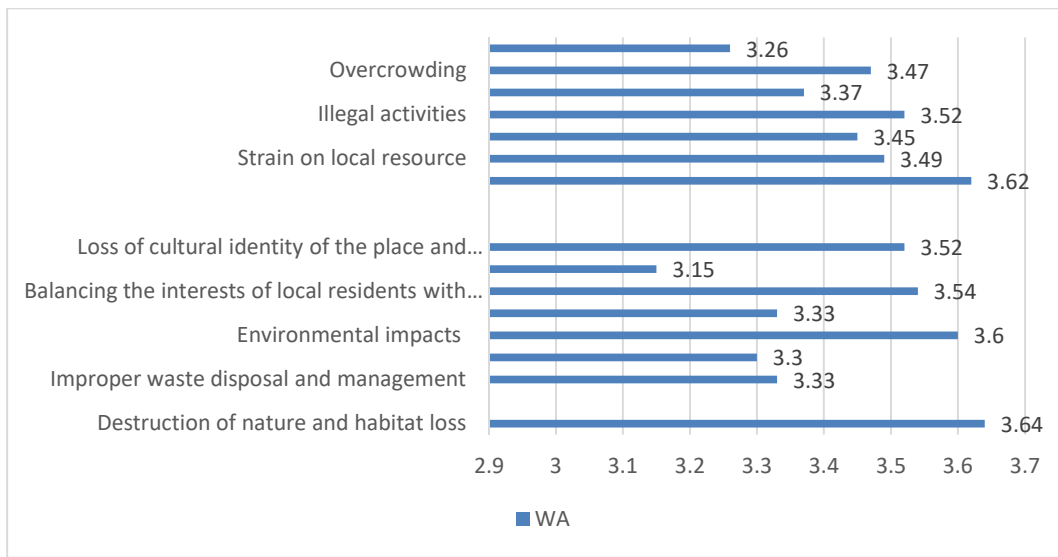
DIFFICULTIES	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	WF	WA
Destruction of nature and habitat loss	13	16	16	8	0	193	3.64
Improper waste disposal and management	5	21	16	11	0	177	3.33
Implementation of water conservation measures and water scarcity	8	17	16	7	5	175	3.30
Environmental impacts	7	25	14	7	0	191	3.60
Seasonal imbalances	9	16	17	6	5	177	3.33
Balancing the interests of local residents with tourism development goals	9	21	13	10	0	188	3.54
Climate change vulnerability	6	13	22	7	5	167	3.15

Loss of cultural identity of the place and community	8	19	19	7	0	187	3.52
Infrastructure strain	11	19	15	8	0	192	3.62
Strain on local resource	7	20	18	8	0	185	3.49
Limited involvement by Govt.	11	18	12	8	4	183	3.45
Illegal activities	7	23	14	9	0	187	3.52
Lack of awareness and education	9	17	16	7	4	179	3.37
Overcrowding	10	15	18	10	0	184	3.47
Others	9	13	19	7	5	173	3.26

(Source: Primary Data)

(SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, SDA= Strongly Disagree, WF= Weighted Frequency, WA= Weighted Average)

Figure 6: Difficulties For Development Of Ecotourism



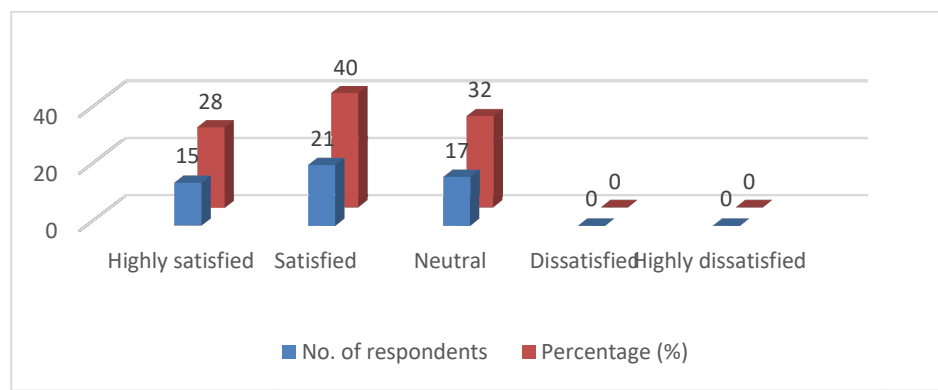
The above table and figure show that destruction of nature and habitat loss, infrastructure strain, environmental impacts, balancing the interests of local people, loss of cultural identity of the place and community and illegal activities are the major difficulties in the development of eco-tourism. Seasonal imbalances and climate change vulnerability are not much serious difficulty in the development of eco-tourism.

Table 7: Level Of Satisfaction Towards The Visited Ecotourism Spots

Level of satisfaction	No. of respondents	Percentage
Highly satisfied	15	28
Satisfied	21	40
Neutral	17	32
Dissatisfied	0	0
Highly Dissatisfied	0	0

(Source: Primary Data)

Figure 7: Level Of Satisfaction Towards The Visited Ecotourism Spots



The above table and figure show that 40 percent of the respondents are satisfied in the visited ecotourism spots and 28 percent of the respondents are highly satisfied in the visited ecotourism spots. 32 percent of the respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied in the visited ecotourism spots. So majority of the respondents are satisfied in the visited eco-tourism spots.

Findings

- Majority of the respondents have awareness about all ecotourism spots in Palakkad district.
- Majority of the respondents prefer wildlife reserves/parks.
- Majority of the respondents often engaged with local community during ecotourism experience.
- Quality of accommodation, tour guide and transportation are good in their ecotourism experience.
- Change in the quality of life of local residents, income generation and opportunity to interact with different people are the major socio-economic benefits of eco-tourism spots. Infrastructure development, employment generation are the next significant socio-economic benefits of ecotourism spots. Entrepreneurship and innovation are the least significant socio-economic benefit of ecotourism spots.
- Destruction of nature and habitat loss, infrastructure strain, environmental impacts, balancing the interests of local people, loss of cultural identity of the place and community and illegal activities are the major difficulties in the development of eco-tourism. Seasonal imbalances and climate change vulnerability are not much serious difficulty in the development of eco-tourism.
- Majority of the respondents are satisfied in the visited eco-tourism spots.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ecotourism potential in Palakkad District, encompassing Nelliampathy, Ananganmala, and Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, is immense. However, unlocking this potential requires a collaborative effort involving local communities, government bodies, and tourists. Stricter regulations, community involvement, and sustainable infrastructure development are crucial elements to ensure that the delicate balance between tourism and conservation is maintained. As we move forward, it is imperative to recognize that responsible tourism not only preserves the natural and cultural treasures of the region but also ensures the well-being of current and future generations. Palakkad District's ecotourism journey is a dynamic and ongoing process that necessitates continuous commitment to sustainability for the benefit of both nature and communities. Change in the quality of life of local residents, income generation and opportunity to interact with different people are the major socio-economic benefits of eco-tourism spots. There are so many destructions or barriers in the development of eco-tourism. Destruction of nature and habitat loss, infrastructure strain, environmental impacts, balancing the interests of local people, loss of cultural identity of the place and community and illegal activities are the major difficulties in the development of eco-tourism. Seasonal

imbalances and climate change vulnerability are not much serious difficulty in the development of eco-tourism. There are government programmes and policies for strengthening the eco-tourism. Through these programmes eco-tourism spots can be more developed and reinforce our sustainability. Proper maintenance of the spots will attract more tourists.

Suggestions

1. Ecotourism department should take necessary actions to develop the transportation facility.
2. Ecotourism department should give more publicity about ecotourism places.
3. Proper awareness programmes should be arranged.
4. Implement and enforce strict waste management practices to ensure minimal environment impact.
5. Promote community-based ecotourism initiatives to involve local communities in preserving and showcasing their natural habitat.

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