
An Empirical Assessment of Tourist Preferences and Sustainable Tourism Practices in Valparai, Western Ghats

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ABSTRACT

Valparai is one of the important places that make Coimbatore district proud. Valparai is part of western ghats which is recognized by UNESCO world heritage site. This study aims to explore the reason behind tourist visits Valparai and their preference towards eco-tourism. The data is collected from 200 respondent through purposive sampling method. The collected data were analyzed through simple percentage, Garret ranking analysis and One-way Anova. The finding of the study holds significant value to the development towards sustainable tourism in Valparai and also helps to policymakers to align the strategies towards ecological protection.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Valparai is one of the important places that make Coimbatore district proud. Valparai is part of western ghats which is recognized by UNESCO world heritage site. Valparai is also known as 7th heaven. It is city as tourist destination with tea and coffee plantations, waterfalls cascading from the mountains like silver wires, and huge dams that store and hold back river water. Main pillar of this region to maintain an eco-tourism is local communities, NGO's and forest department. NGO's and forest department collaborate with local communities educate them to wild life monitoring and guide to tourists. Eco-tourist



plays a vital role in shaping a sustainable tourism practice, it is essential to know their understanding and preference towards environmental and cultural significance about Valparai. This study aims to explore the reason behind tourist visits Valparai and their preference towards eco-tourism. The finding of the study will use to develop the sustainable tourism that meet visitors' expectation and also protect the environmental goals.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mohd Rusli Yacob et al, (2011) conducted study with the objective of to investigate the tourist perception on ecotourism management and development. The results found that tourists have different preferences against their profiles in term of ecotourism resource management and maintenance as well as on revenue implementation. The results provide useful implications on ecotourism resources management in marine park. **Nguyen Nguyen Dang and Ali Abdulbaqi Ameen Ali (2018)** made a study to Analyze the Tourist satisfaction towards service quality of traveling companies. The result of the study indicating that the visitors' satisfaction had the most positive effect to the sustainable tourism development. **Rani . S (2020)** did a study to find out how Level of satisfaction tourist attained from ecotourism in India. Concluded her study as, the visitors from various places of home and host country perceived that there is an improvement in the accessibility of the tourist places. **Shreyashi Kundu et al., (2022)** made a study to Find out how Level of Satisfaction Tourist Attained from Ecotourism in India. The conclusions of the study show that the great majority of respondents were local tourists and they have positive relationships between an experience with ecotourism in India. **Sihem DEKHILI and Mohamed Akli ACHABOU (2015)** to examine the study to define the contents of the concept of "ecotourism" from the tourists' point of view and to determine the various expectations. The results show that the concept of ecotourism evokes for the tourists essentially an environmental dimension related to the planet preservation, the visited sites' protection, the natural and sustainable character of the travel.

3. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Tourism in Valparai had both opportunities and challenger for the region's environment and local communities. Tourism can generate income as well as promote economic development, it is also damaging ecosystem and disrupting traditional way of life. To ensure the sustainable tourism, it is essential to understand tourists understanding and preference for eco-tourism practices in Valparai. In this study aim to find the reason for visiting Valparai among tourist and their understanding and preferences towards



eco-tourism practice. This study aims to provide understanding that can inform sustainable tourism in Valparai.

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- ✚ To find the reason for visiting Valparai among the tourists.
- ✚ To discover the tourist preferences towards eco-friendly tourism practices in Valparai

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on primary data. The data is collected from 200 respondent through purposive sampling method. The collected data were analyzed through simple percentage, Garret ranking analysis and One-way Anova.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1. Simple Percentage

TABLE 1. SOCIO- ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

| Socio-Economic Profile | Sub Category | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Age | Below 19 | 22 | 11 |
| | 20 to 41 | 132 | 66 |
| | Above 42 | 46 | 23 |
| Gender | Male | 98 | 49 |
| | Female | 102 | 51 |
| Area of Residence | Rural | 99 | 49 |
| | Urban | 101 | 51 |
| Educational Qualification | Illiterate | 13 | 6 |
| | Up to HSC | 54 | 27 |
| | Under Graduate | 80 | 40 |
| | Post Graduate | 37 | 19 |
| | Professional | 4 | 2 |
| Marital Status | Others | 12 | 6 |
| | Married | 96 | 48 |
| Family Type | Unmarried | 104 | 52 |
| | Joint Family | 66 | 33 |
| Occupation | Nuclear Family | 134 | 67 |
| | Student | 75 | 38 |
| | Daily wage earners | 19 | 9 |
| | Govt Employee | 6 | 3 |



| | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----|----|
| | Private Employee | 46 | 23 |
| | Business | 19 | 9 |
| | Agriculturist | 22 | 11 |
| | Homemaker | 13 | 7 |
| No of members in family | Up to 2 | 167 | 83 |
| | 3 -4 Members | 30 | 15 |
| | Above 4 Members | 3 | 2 |
| Earning members in family | One | 62 | 31 |
| | Two | 106 | 53 |
| | Three | 27 | 13 |
| | Above 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Respondent Monthly Income | Up to Rs. 30,000 | 140 | 70 |
| | Rs. 30,001-Rs. 50,000 | 33 | 17 |
| | Rs. 50,001- Rs. 1,00,000 | 16 | 8 |
| | Above Rs. 1,00,000 | 11 | 5 |
| Family Monthly Income | Up to Rs. 50,000 | 106 | 53 |
| | Rs. 50,001- Rs. 1,00,000 | 50 | 25 |
| | Above Rs. 1,00,000 | 44 | 22 |

It is observed that 49% (98 tourists) were male, while 51% (102 tourists) were female. The majority of the tourists, 52% (104 tourists), were unmarried individuals, while 48% (96 tourists) were married. In terms of age, 11% (22 tourists) were below 19 years old, the vast majority, 66% (132 tourists), were between 20 and 41 years old, and 23% (46 tourists) were 42 years old or above. The majority of the tourists, 51% (101 tourists), resided in urban areas, while 49% (99 tourists) resided in rural areas.

When the education levels of the individuals included in the sample are examined, it is observed that the largest group, 40% (80 tourists), were undergraduates, followed by 27% (54 tourists) who had education up to HSC, and 19% (37 tourists) who were post-graduates. Additionally, 6% (13 tourists) were illiterate, 2% (4 tourists) had professional qualifications, and another 6% (12 tourists) had other qualifications. In terms of family type, the majority, 67% (134 tourists), had nuclear families, while 33% (66 tourists) had joint families. The most common occupation among the tourists was student, accounting for 38% (75 tourists), followed by private employees at 23% (46 tourists) and agriculturists at 11% (22 tourists). Daily wage earners and business owners each constituted 9% (19 tourists). Government employees made up 3% (6 tourists), and homemakers represented 7% (13 tourists).

Regarding the number of family members, a significant majority, 83% (167 tourists), belonged to families with up to 2 members, followed by 15% (30 tourists) in families with 3-4 members, and only 2% (3 tourists) in families with more than 4 members. In terms of earning members in the family, 53% (106 tourists) reported having two earning members, 31% (62 tourists) had one earning member, 13% (27 tourists) had three earning members, and 3% (5 tourists) had more than three earning members.



Concerning the tourists' monthly income, 70% (140 tourists) earned up to Rs. 30,000, 17% (33 tourists) earned between Rs. 30,001 and Rs. 50,000, 8% (16 tourists) earned between Rs. 50,001 and Rs. 1,00,000, and 5% (11 tourists) earned above Rs. 1,00,000. Looking at the family monthly income, 53% (106 tourists) belonged to families with an income up to Rs. 50,000, 25% (50 tourists) had a family income between Rs. 50,001 and Rs. 1,00,000, and 22% (44 tourists) had a family income above Rs. 1,00,000. It concluded that the tourists were predominantly female, unmarried, and residing in urban areas. The largest group had an undergraduate degree, came from nuclear families, and were students. A significant majority belonged to smaller families with up to two members and reported having two earning members. The majority of the tourists had a personal monthly income of up to Rs. 30,000, and over half belonged to families with a monthly income of up to Rs. 50,000.

6.2. GARRET RANKING

In order to find the most preferred reasons for visiting Valparai, the tourist was asked to rank all the factors in order of preference. Then, the Garret Ranking tool has been used to find the most preferred reason for visiting Valparai among the tourist.

TABLE 2. REASON FOR VISITING VALPARAI

| Factor/Rank | Rank 1 | Rank 2 | Rank 3 | Rank 4 | Rank 5 | Rank 6 | Rank 7 | Rank 8 | AVG. | Rank |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|
| Scenic Beauty | 1840 | 1608 | 2340 | 1749 | 611 | 920 | 544 | 560 | 50.86 | 5 |
| Attractive Climate | 1600 | 3216 | 1680 | 1696 | 658 | 320 | 960 | 400 | 52.65 | 3 |
| Pollution Free Environment | 2480 | 2613 | 1500 | 1749 | 705 | 840 | 416 | 460 | 53.82 | 1 |
| Wild Life | 3200 | 335 | 600 | 2862 | 2115 | 1000 | 384 | 180 | 53.38 | 2 |
| Viewing and Accessibility | 1200 | 603 | 1920 | 1484 | 1739 | 720 | 1184 | 480 | 46.65 | 7 |
| Nearness | 2240 | 1005 | 1980 | 371 | 2538 | 920 | 992 | 180 | 51.13 | 4 |
| Cost Effectiveness | 400 | 2077 | 1860 | 689 | 423 | 480 | 1440 | 1080 | 42.25 | 8 |
| Relaxation and Wellness | 3120 | 1675 | 120 | 106 | 611 | 2760 | 608 | 620 | 48.10 | 6 |

Based on above table the first Rank, is Pollution Free Environment. This suggests that tourists highly value the unspoiled and fresh nature of Valparai. the factor Wild Life Viewing and Safari



Experiences is Ranked second, signifying a strong attraction towards the opportunities for wildlife encounters in the area. Attractive Climate is measured the third most significant factor, highlighting the significance of enjoyable weather in portrayal visitors.

Nearness to the destination got fourth Rank, significant that proximity plays a notable role in tourists' choices. Scenic Beauty is Ranked fifth, showing that while valued. Relaxation and Wellness opportunities are Ranked sixth, indicating that these aspects contribute to the destination's appeal but are not main drivers for most visitors. Accessibility to Valparai is Ranked seventh, implying that it is a consideration but not a major deciding factor. Finally, Cost Effectiveness is perceived as Ranking eighth, indicating that the expense of visiting is not a main concern for the majority of tourists to Valparai.

The Garrett ranking method has been used to determine the activities that tourist prioritize during their visit of Valparai. This methodology helps to identify the most common preferred activities, based on preference of tourism in Valparai.

TABLE 3. ACTIVITIES PRIORITIZE DURING THE VISIT OF VALPARAI

| Factor/Rank | Rank 1 | Rank 2 | Rank 3 | Rank 4 | Rank 5 | Rank 6 | Rank 7 | Rank 8 | AVG. | Rank |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|
| Visiting Wildlife Sanctuaries | 6960 | 1943 | 660 | 1802 | 141 | 480 | 352 | 260 | 62.99 | 1 |
| Adventure Activities (Trekking and Hiking, Bike Riding) | 3040 | 4154 | 1380 | 530 | 987 | 920 | 480 | 160 | 58.26 | 2 |
| Tea Garden Visit | 1840 | 1273 | 5160 | 1113 | 705 | 560 | 160 | 340 | 55.76 | 3 |
| Waterfalls Exploration | 1520 | 2144 | 720 | 4240 | 611 | 360 | 928 | 120 | 53.22 | 4 |
| Attending Fairs and Festivals | 400 | 1005 | 1620 | 742 | 3008 | 1280 | 832 | 340 | 46.14 | 6 |
| Historical Site Exploration (Temple, Water Dam) | 1360 | 536 | 600 | 1007 | 2256 | 2920 | 512 | 180 | 46.86 | 5 |



| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-------|---|
| Photography | 800 | 1742 | 1260 | 848 | 987 | 600 | 2240 | 420 | 44.49 | 7 |
| Tent Camps & Campfire and music | 80 | 603 | 660 | 318 | 705 | 880 | 864 | 2180 | 31.45 | 8 |

The above Garrett Ranking table reveals the preferred tourist activities in the area. Visiting Wildlife Sanctuaries emerges as the most favored activity, securing the first rank (62.99), it indicates a strong interest among tourists in experiencing the local wildlife. Adventure Activities (Trekking and Hiking, Bike Riding) is the second most preferred activity (58.26), highlighting the appeal of outdoor and adventurous pursuits. Tea Garden Visit ranks third (55.76), suggesting that exploring the tea estates is a significant draw for visitors. Waterfalls Exploration holds the fourth rank (53.22), indicating a considerable interest in natural water features. Historical Site Exploration (Temple, Water Dam) is ranked fifth (46.86), showing a moderate level of interest in cultural and historical attractions. Attending Fairs and Festivals comes in at the sixth rank with (46.14), suggesting a mild interest in local cultural events. Photography is ranked seventh (44.49), indicating a lower priority for this activity among tourists. Finally, Tent Camps & Campfire and music is the least preferred activity, ranking eighth (31.45).

It concluded that the most popular tourist activities are centered around wildlife and adventure, followed by exploring tea gardens and waterfalls. This suggests that the primary attractions of this destination lie in its natural and adventurous offerings.

6.3. ONE WAY ANOVA

To find whether any different socio-economic groups exhibit varying preferences, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. This methodology employed to find if there are any statistically significant differences in the Preference Index across within socio-economic variables.

TABLE 4. PREFERENCES TOWARDS ECO-FRIENDLY TOURISM PRACTICES- ONE WAY ANOVA

| INDEPENDENT VARIABLE | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | P VALUE | DECISION |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Age | Preference Index | .269 | Not Significant |
| Gender | Preference Index | .631 | Not Significant |



| | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|------|--------------------|
| Area of Residence | Preference Index | .04 | Significant |
| Education Qualification | Preference Index | .01 | Significant |
| Marital Status | Preference Index | .842 | Not Significant |
| Family Type | Preference Index | .229 | Not Significant |
| Occupation | Preference Index | .342 | Not Significant |
| No of members in family | Preference Index | .564 | Not Significant |
| Earning members in family | Preference Index | .525 | Not Significant |
| Respondent Monthly Income | Preference Index | .137 | Not Significant |
| Family Monthly Income | Preference Index | .00 | Significant |

The finding shows that there are significant differences in the Preference Index across the three categories within socio-economic variables. The preference levels of respondents from rural areas are significantly different from those in urban areas. Similarly, individuals with different educational qualifications and monthly income of the family exhibit significantly determining the preference levels.

6. CONCLUSION

The finding of the study reveals that tourists place highest value on pollution-free environment. It is clearly shows that tourists are drawn mostly to the destination's unspoiled natural beauty, pleasant weather, biodiversity. The Valparai identified as destination rooted in eco-tourism practice. Furthermore, the study highlights the most preferred activity is wildlife and adventure activities followed by visiting tea plantation and waterfalls. Importantly, the study finds significant variation in preference across socio-economic groups such as education, income and residence of the respondent. The study suggests education, income and residence plays a vital role in shaping an eco-tourism behavior. These finding hold significant value to the development towards sustainable tourism in Valparai and also helps to policymakers to align the strategies towards ecological protection.

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