PREFACE

Tourism has developed swiftly during the past four decades and is predicted to become the world’s leading economic activity by the year 2020. Emergence of tourism as a major industry is one of the most remarkable changes that have taken place in the economic activity of the post-world war era. The industry has grown from being a marginal aspect of national economic life to an important socio-economic asset since late 1970s. As WTO observes, tourism is the world’s largest growing industry. Tourism is about people and landscapes, the locations which one group of people leave, visit and pass through, the other groups who make their trips possible and those groups they meet along the way. The idea of sustainable tourism includes a challenge to develop the world’s tourism capacity and the quality of its products without negatively affecting the environment that sustains and nourishes them.

Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas. Ecotourism activities have been increasing rapidly worldwide over the past two decades and further growth is expected in the years coming. The natural resources such as forests, wildlife and water resources are very significant for ecotourism. Ecological degradation and biodiversity loss are serious threats to ecotourism industry.

India is among one of the twelve mega bio-diversity countries with vast resources in the form of natural landscapes and bio-diversity areas and heritage sites. These areas provide tremendous potential in terms of promoting ecotourism. To develop ecotourism as a tool for such areas, it is important that it be developed and managed in a manner whereby all threats to global bio-diversity are minimised and options for sustainable livelihoods are being created. Ecotourism act as a tool for sustainable development.

Tourism stimulates cultural activities and leads to improved understanding of each other. Ecotourism are considered to be the fastest growing market in the
tourism industry. Kerala is witnessing high tourist inflow to ecotourism destinations. As many countries are moving forward in the direction of earning valuable foreign exchange through ecotourism, the importance of the study about ecotourism is increasing. From the literature review it is revealed that, there is no in-depth study about the scope of ecotourism in Idukki district. This study tries to fill in that gap. The general objective of the study is to make an evaluation of ecotourism destinations in Kerala with special reference to Idukki district. The present work has been conceptualised on the basis of how far ecotourism appear to be an option for sustainable development and conservation of environment of Idukki district. It is hoped that present work will bring into light various facets of ecotourism, the impact of ecotourism on local communities, flora and fauna and environment.