Chapter 7

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Kerala is the first State in India to realize the need for promoting tourism on a sustainable line. The socio-cultural and environmental peculiarities of the State have enabled the launch of diverse tourism projects. Recognizing the economic potential, a number of steps have been initiated, both by the public and by the private sectors, to promote tourism. Within a period of two and half decades, since 1986 when tourism was declared as an industry in Kerala, as a productive sector, tourism has achieved commendable progress and this is reflected in the tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings. Again, wide spread promotional and innovative practices in tourism have enabled the State to bag several national and international awards.

Eco-tourism is one of the fast growing tourism sectors in Kerala, contributing 30 per cent of the total revenue from tourism sector (Tourism Statistics, Government of Kerala). Eastern Kerala consists of land encroached upon by the Western Ghats; the region thus includes high mountains, gorges and deep-cut valleys. The wildest lands are covered with dense forests, while other regions lie under tea and coffee plantations or other forms of cultivation. The Western Ghats rises on an average of 1500 metre elevation above sea level. Certain peaks may reach to 2800 metre. The Kerala eco-tourism sites offer pleasant and pleasurable diversions that range from going on hiking, biking, trekking and hill climbing tours, wildlife safaris to the numerous wildlife sanctuaries located on the hills.
Even though eco-tourism offers various opportunities and promises, it possesses some shortcomings too. Scarcity of the ancillary services and facilities, protest from environmentalists and local communities etc are some of the hurdles confronted by the eco-tourism industry. This sector is not in a position to meet the increasing demand of the tourists. In this context, the researcher tries to identify the potentiality of Kerala as an eco-tourist centre and to evaluate the shortcomings to attract more customers. It is also relevant to examine the various issues confronted by the tourists in the state of Kerala, since their overall satisfaction is highly essential for marketing the destinations and for the state to achieve its overall economic growth.

In this juncture study has conducted to review the satisfaction level of tourists in various eco-tourism centres. In addition, the study points out the economic and social impacts of eco-tourism destinations in Kerala. The study leads to the following findings:

**Findings of the Study**

The major findings of the study, based on the analysis of the data, are summarized below.

1) Up to two third (65.89%) are male and the rest (34.11%) are female and most of tourist having visits to eco-destinations are Foreigners

2) In the well-known hill stations of Kerala, Munnar stands first, Ponmudi second, Malampuzha third and Nelliampathi the last known.

3) More than 58% of the tourists who visited the eco-tourism spots in Kerala are married, 32.03% are unmarried, 5.47% are divorced and 4.43% are widowed.
4) The purpose of visit is more for entertainment than for education and research.

5) 31.77% of visitors are from business field and 9.64% are professionals. Only 7.03% are employees and others form 39.58% of the total.

6) With regard to the monthly income level of the respondents, 45.05% of them have an income between Rs: 40001 to Rs: 50000 and only 19.72% of them have an income above Rs: 50000.

7) Among the sources of information, media plays a prominent role, non-Indian tour operators occupy a second place. The other sources are friends, relatives, Indian tour operators, government tourist’s offices etc.

8) The awareness of rivers among the tourists range like the following- Periyar 87.1%, Bharathapuzha 86.4%, Pampa 85.4%, Manimala 81.6% and Chandragiri 81.5%. The beauty of Meenachil, Kabani and Neyyar have charmed the hearts of 80.1%, 79.8% and 78.8% respectively. Some 76.5% of the tourists known about Achankoil while 73.3% know about Vamanapuram, 73.15% about Ithikkara, 72.9% about Kallai and 64.4% about Kallada. Another 60.15% know about Bhavani very well.

9) Regarding the eco-tourism importance, 88.8% of the tourists know about Kovalm very well, Bakel stands second with 76.3% and Varkala third with 76.1%. The rest as follows- Thirumullavaram-70.6%, Mararikkulam-69.4%, Kanwatheera-68.5%, Kappad-67.4%,Payyambalam-67.2% and Meenkunu while 62.4%. 
10) Out of the 10 wildlife sanctuaries of Kerala, Idukki is better known with 75.5%, Peechi, Vazhani, Chinnar and parambikulam stands second, third and fourth. Periyar, Shenduruny, Chimmini, Wayanad and Neyyar wildlife sanctuaries are known by 70.3%, 69.4%, 66.9%, 64.1% and 60.6% respectively. Only 57.1% of the tourists were popular about Peppara Wildlife sanctuary.

11) Regarding the travel motives of the tourists visiting in Kerala, the critical factor is ‘enjoy a warm climate’. It occupies the first rank as per the study. The second rank is covered by the factor ‘feel at home away from home’. Third rank is covered by two important factors such as ‘have fun and be entertained and lakes and streams. Fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth positions are covered by the factors such as see maximum in time available, being together as a family, vest friends and relatives, meet people with similar interest respectively. Only 6% of the tourists wanted to visit places where they could enjoy safety and security.

12) The main attraction of the visitors to visit the eco-tourism destination is to learn about nature. Trees, wild flowers and wilderness are the main attraction to certain other visitors. Some other like tropical forests and some are interested in photography.

13) Towards the significance of different destinations like hills, rivers, beaches and wildlife sanctuaries, an equal importance is given by the tourists to hills and rivers (91.5%). Wild life sanctuaries are given importance by 61.2% and beaches by 53.91%.
14) As per the study, the main reason for the tourists not to visit hills and wildlife sanctuaries is the lack of infrastructure. Shortage of time is the main problem for not visiting rivers and the reason for not visiting beaches is due to lack of interest.

15) On the benefits of eco-tourism some agreed and some strongly agreed that these centres provide enjoyable place, benefit the economy, protect flora and fauna and contribute awareness to the public. Some others disagree with this argument and some are not sure about the opinion.

16) The main reasons for tourist’s dissatisfaction found in the survey are the absence of enforcement of rules and lack of proper tourists-spot guidance.

17) According to the study only 1% of the eco-tourists have the opinion that the eco-tourism authorities succeed in locating the ecologically important spots and in bringing them to the attention by the tourists. 43.25% of the respondents were not sure about it. Another 21.25% opined that their role is somewhat poor. And 18.25% said that the role of authorities is very poor. A 16.25% of them opined that the role of authorities is somewhat good.

18) In connection with the role of eco-tourism authorities in providing transportation facilities, majority came under ‘not sure category’. Only 7.75% of the respondents felt very good. 15.25% of them came in somewhat good. 36.5% of the respondents felt it very poor or somewhat poor.

19) Regarding the role of eco-tourism authorities in providing accommodation, major number of the respondents skipped away without giving a definite answer. It is a fact that
tourism is based on season and when there is a favourable season, large number of tourists rushes to the tourism spots. In such circumstances, it is impossible to provide all of them with proper accommodation facilities.

20) In connection with the hospitality of the eco-tourism authorities, a major number of respondents passed a favourable opinion about the government agencies.

21) The findings of the survey testify the fact that things would be better in the hands of the local governing bodies, as the local people would be better aware of the scope of exploiting the possibilities of that particular area. The officials realise the importance of the local assistance in the eco-tourism that they favour a measure to redress the grievances of the local people.

22) The study reveals the fact that more than 1/4th of the respondents were really happy with the role of government agency in settling disputes. An equal number responded as very poor or somewhat poor.

23) The key management issues in Eco-Tourism are the use of eco-technology, management of environmental quality, limits of acceptable change, management of tourists use, allocation access, market specialisation, management of recreation conflict, enforcement and monitoring, consumer assurance of quality, physical design, community development, financial viability and public and private sector co-operation.

24) Most of the people in the eco-tourism destinations are unaware of using the medicinal plants. If better encouraged, the traditional system of medicines could be a reason for attracting men to these spots and thus health tourism can be promoted.
25) In spite of a healthy market for the handicraft products, a considerably good percentage (26.67%) of locals know how to make the curious, exciting pieces of handicrafts.

26) In the local areas around which the eco-tourism spots are scattered, it is a tough task to manage the energy and water requirements. The state of Kerala has managed the problem with a 58% of success.

27) Waste management is one of the major problems faced by the eco-tourism authorities and the average quantity of waste per tourists is considerably low as compared to other states.

28) While going through the many sided impacts of the eco-tourism projects, one of the issues is in connection with the effectiveness of control of environmental factors.

29) In order to reduce the environmental degradation, the devices such as zoning of eco-tourism, control of tourist vehicles, increased level of public policy discussion, use of fees to control access to import and fragile resources etc can be used. Most of the tourists argued that zoning of eco-tourism is the best device.

30) The study reveals the fact that foreign tourists were more bent upon preserving the environment of eco-tourism places than the domestic ones. Domestic tourists cause 77% of the damages while foreigners cause only 23% of them.
31) With regard to the exploitation of the tourists from the part of an organised circle the local people play relatively less vital role as compared to packaged tour operators, hotel managers, accommodation managers and merchants.

32) Among the wildlife sanctuaries in Kerala, the foremost one is the Thekkady sanctuary which offers a trouble free observation of wild animals together with a boating expedition.

33) The present physical design of the wildlife sanctuaries is highly satisfied with 12.76%, somewhat satisfied by 29.69% and not sure about 24.22%, whereas it is highly unsatisfactory to 13.80% and somewhat unsatisfactory to 19.53%.

34) 4/5 of the respondents argued that the eco-tourism project extends the community development of the locality.

35) With regard to the sufficiency of funds, 86.67% of the respondents pointed out that the funds were quite insufficient for driving any plan to its true goal.
Conclusion:

Eco-tourism is a new concept in tourism. It is a purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. The growing recognition among tourists that natural environment needs protection and conservation, promoted the concept of ecotourism. According to Erickson (2003), that tourism does not play a part in the environmental problems but is also one of the first factors that suffer from the deterioration of ecosystem.

Kerala, of all the states in India, offers the maximum potential for the promotion of ecotourism. Miles and miles of endless serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, pristine valleys and mountains, exotic species of rare flora and fauna, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, enchanting art forms, magical festivals and cultural monuments are all unique to Kerala and has given it the sobriquet of ‘Gods Own Country’. The National Geographic Traveller has labelled Kerala as one of the 10 paradises in the world. Kerala is thus ideally suited for the promotion of eco-tourism and has already initiated several steps in this direction.

Kerala has emerged as one of the most favoured destinations in any part of the world. In order to keep this goodwill and to stay ahead Kerala tourism has attempted a series of eco-initiatives to make the tourism industry truly environment friendly. Tourism is an environment dependent industry. When environment deteriorates, an option for tourism also declines. The physical and cultural environment of a destination is often the major
attractions. Being the leader in innovative tourism initiatives, Kerala tourism is now poised to convert the entire tourism industry in Kerala into eco-friendly mode. The lessons learned so far within the state and other initiatives in the world can be useful in achieving the goals set. Hence proper publicity and scientific planning are the need of the hour. Several concepts like green accounting and international pricing are emerging in the field of ecological economics which can be applied in protected areas also (Animon, 2003). More broad based democratic participation of local communities in planning and implementation of eco-tourism programmes will ensure long term sustainability (GOK, 1999). These steps would surely position Kerala as an ideal eco-tourism destination.

The study reaches the conclusion that the present eco-tourism centres are facing several problems. The suggestions given above can rectify these problems up to a certain extend. Eco-tourism is a very good exploitation area for Kerala and the government. The tourism department must establish eco-parks all over Kerala so as to protect the greenery of our state and also to increase our status in the world tourism map.
Suggestions

1. There should be more awareness about the eco-tourism destinations in Kerala by the tourism department through broachers, pamphlets, media advertisements etc.

2. More websites should be commenced in order to give more information about the tourism destinations.

3. More activities have to be introduced and performed by the government to promote eco-tourism.

4. Sanitation facilities should be increased and improved by the authorities in order to provide better facilities to the visitors.

5. More infrastructural facilities like roads, hospitals, hotels etc have to be provided at the eco-tourism destinations.

6. The transportation facilities to the eco-tourism destinations should be increased.

7. Locals should be allowed to participate in the activities of the tourism departments in order to get better support from them.

8. Shopping facilities of the eco-tourism destinations must be increased and indigenous products have to be popularised.

9. Shows like musical fountain, laser show etc must be made technological and should be showed at all times.
10. Rock climbing, trucking, bungee jumping has to be popularised at Thenmala.

11. Instead of making the eco-tourism destinations as ‘holiday spots’, it must be changed to ‘learning spots’.

12. KTDC should establish more hotels at the eco-tourism destinations and should be able to provide local food, local entertainments etc.

13. Cultural programmes should be introduced at the eco-tourism destinations as a medium of cultural exchange.

14. Professionalism in hospitality management should be enforced.

15. Good gardening system should be introduced at the tourism destinations in order to give better environment.

16. The female penetration in the eco-tourism destinations should be increased.

17. Serious research on the ecological diversity at the eco-tourism destinations should be given proper importance.

18. Introduce proper enforcement of rules at the tourism destinations with the help of police and similar agencies.

19. Visit- Information centres must be established to provide every kind of information such as giving proper direction on safe travelling, secure lodging, arrange proper guidance, saving from exploitation and providing legal assistance.
20. New ways and means must be introduced to promote health tourism.