Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Being a dynamic sector, tourism is often considered as one of the largest growing industries in the world. It plays a significant role in the economic and social development of destinations and communities around the world. Hence, many countries consider tourism as a means for economic development. The future of Travel & Tourism is high as demand from emerging markets continues with unbridled speed. Besides, the large emerging middleclass all over is more able than ever to travel both within and beyond its borders (WTTC, 2016). In response to the increased needs of a new age tourist populace, keen interventions in areas of infrastructure development, transportation and destination management are sought.

It is imperative to note that many travelers are much concerned about the ethical practices involved in tourism destinations. Also, tourists often look into matters of
environment, culture, and sustainable practices of companies to choose responsible products (Tearfund, 2002). At the same time, the issue of overreaching of the carrying capacity of destinations and the adverse impacts of tourism on the lives of local residents and environment raises questions on the future of tourism, and emerges as serious issues of concern for tourism planners and policy makers.

Studies have reported that the lives of communities in tourism-influential areas are under significant pressure due to consequences of development (Buckley et al; 2003; Butler, 2006; Hall & Vredenburg, 2004; Richins & Pearce, 2000, and Ryan & Deci, 2001). Increased impacts of tourism cause several potential environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political problems in destinations, which call for an urgent need for alternative and host-friendly practices in tourism planning and development. However, the huge economic impact of tourism has surpassed these concerns and has in a way suppressed the aforesaid concerns.

It is often complained that tourism is developed at the cost of the community at the destinations (Pradhan & Ranjan, 2010). Rather than bridging the gap, corporate growth is sometimes seen as widening the gulf between the rich and the poor (Dunning, 2003). When the government is obliged to undertake strong developmental initiatives, the business sector is also expected to play an active role by doing Responsible Business which ensures an equitable distribution of wealth and well-being of the communities in which the business operates.
Considering the objectives of inclusive development, socio-cultural enhancement and environmental conservation, stakeholders of tourism come out with various novel concepts to practice sustainable tourism development. Among these, the emerging concept of Responsible Tourism (RT) is gaining wide currency. Responsible Tourism envisages a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach which ensures commitment towards society, economy, and environment along with profit maximization. Responsible Tourism led by the local government needs to be practiced at destinations to achieve a win-win situation and to maintain sustainability of destinations.

A Responsible Tourism policy encompassing the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability of destinations which would also involve wide participation of stakeholders is the need of the hour. This is to ensure clean image, competitiveness and Quality of Life of communities at tourism destinations. Against this background, this research, in general, is aimed at exploring the impacts of Responsible Tourism practices and their role in the creation of sustainable communities and sustainable tourism destinations.

The study comprises two parts. The first part explains the impacts of Responsible Tourism on the destination and community through a theoretical model and the latter discusses the role of business enterprises in sustainable destination management (Responsible Business).
1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Tourism impact studies delve into an alarming issue. While local communities lose their existing income sources, very little has been achieved in bringing about a more balanced development and equitable distribution of income generated from tourism (Pleumarom, 2012; Sharply & Telfer, 2002; Telfer & Wall, 2000, and Torres, 2003). Studies infer that the revenue generated from tourism is relatively small and it does not even outweigh the costs (Breugel, 2013; Goodwin & Rupesh, 2015; Krippendorf, 1982, and Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). Additionally, the activities of allied sectors like accommodation facilities, leisure services, travel and tour operators, and various other micro and macro enterprises also produce negative consequences.

While destinations develop, the natural environment or culture that originally attracted tourists will be replaced by commercial interests which in turn will make tourism a mere mechanical experience (Telfer & Wall, 2000; Torres, 2003, and Sharply & Telfer, 2002). Various issues like environmental pollution, congestion, noise, high cost of living, and spiraling inflation may result in dissatisfaction among tourists and a kind of antagonism among local residents (Cavus & Tanrisevdi, 2003; Liu & Var, 1986; Shafer et al; 2006, and Kim, 2002). For instance, the Alpine areas are very subtle to tourism activities resulting from unscientific development (Murphy, 1993).
The Kerala Context: There is no exception in the case of Kerala where population density is high, migration and urbanization rates are high, per head land holdings are small and people’s inclination towards modern lifestyles are on an upward spiral. It is evident from Fig 1.1 and Fig 1.2 that over the past five years, tourist inflows as well as revenue from tourism in Kerala have showed an increasing trend.

![Tourist Arrivals in Kerala](image1)
![Revenue from Tourism in Kerala](image2)

**Fig 1.1 Tourist Arrivals in Kerala  Fig.1.2 Revenue from Tourism in Kerala (Source: Kerala Tourism Statistics, 2015)**

However, the world renowned backwaters are under the threat of severe environmental impairment due to both endogenous and exogenous factors that seriously affect the wetland ecosystem and the livelihood of dependent communities (Florence, 2002 and Siby et al; 2008). Florence (2002) who did a study in Aleppy and Kumarakom regions of Kerala, reported that many companies offer employment to local people to cover-up pollution-related issues. The presence of more than 1,500 houseboats exceeding the carrying capacity of the backwaters reduces the control and freedom of the local community over the water body and it
increases the uncontrolled disposal of plastic waste like bottles and carry-bags into the water bodies. It has also increased the presence of coliform bacteria to an uncontrollable level.

Florence (2002) also argued that business interventions lead to mangrove destruction, biodiversity loss, control over public access to beaches and common places, water pollution and degradation of tradition. Due to the onslaught of the tourism sector and its impact on tourism development, large swathes of agriculture land are being converted to resorts. The presence of resorts on the bank of the Vembanadu lake has hampered the employment chances and livelihood of traditional fisher folk. The privacy of women, who use the water body for bathing and washing, has been lost due to backwater tourism. The alarming decline in area of the freshwater Shasthamkotta Lake in Kollam, which comes under the Ramsar Wetland Conservation, has been a major topic of discussion for many years.

A study on ecologically and culturally fragile areas in Kerala by Saji & Narayanasamy (2008) found that tourism development had serious repercussions on the life of the very community which depended on the ecosystem for its livelihood. The accessibility of the local people to water bodies for their livelihood was hindered by business interests, and their livelihood sources were being choked by the presence of heavy houseboat traffic which created water pollution also. The kind of development in Thekkady that attracted neo-residents for employment and business opportunities was threatening the ecological purity of the area. Though
the area is ecologically and culturally fragile, existing tourism in the protected area is congested with the excessive presence of resorts and shops.

A community feedback survey conducted by Kerala Tourism (2012) in Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayand identified that 52%, 45%, 15% and 47% of the respondents respectively of the destination had no positive response towards tourism.

Responding to the questions on their approach towards the business community, 32%, 20%, 49% and 38% respectively opined that the community had a good relationship with the trading community. Regarding the environmental impact of tourism, 55%, 70%, 20%, and 65% respectively were concerned about pollution and related environmental hazards.
**Visitors Dynamics:** A positive trend of environmental consciousness is arising amongst travelers. Tourists are concerned about the ethics of travel while taking purchase decisions. The UK-based NGO, Tearfund, found that British tourists are very likely to enquire about the country, environmental impact, and the possibilities of meeting the local people, before booking their holiday trip. It was seen that 52% of UK travelers prefer to book a holiday with a company that has a written code guaranteeing good working conditions, protection of the environment and support of local charities at tourist destinations. As ethical business practices have a competitive edge, the demand for “Responsible Tourism” products has increased, and is now becoming an emerging marketing tool for destinations (Paul & Rupesh, 2013; Spenceley et al; 2002, and Tearfund, 2002).

**Need for an Alternative Approach:** In the sector of tourism, development and conservation should not be seen as ‘opposing forces’ but it should go ‘hand in hand’ to be beneficial for all stakeholders; that require a careful approach – “conserve thoughtfully and develop sustainably” (UNEP & WTO, 2005 and Gadgil, 2013). It was against this background that various organizations of global interest like the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) came out with the concepts of Destination Sustainability and Responsible Tourism.

As the concept ‘sustainability’ emerges as the novel way of tourism development, many governments, international development agencies, trade associations, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations acknowledge the
success of Responsible Tourism (RT). The present study proposes a process model which structurally depicts the relationship between Responsible Tourism, Destination Sustainability, and Quality of Life (QOL) of the local community. This is under the assumption that Responsible Tourism leads to the sustainability of destinations that subsequently improves the Quality of Life (QOL) of residents.

Considering the crucial role played by the industry at destinations, the study also probed the contribution of business enterprises in maintaining Destination Sustainability and the Quality of Life of local residents at destinations. The findings of the study will contribute to strategic decision-making and policy development process on sustainable tourism development.

1.2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Theories state that local communities are influenced by tourism development (Allen et al; 1993; Butler, 2011; Doxey, 1975, and Emerson, 1972). When visitors feel the warmth of the host community, they are more likely to visit again and recommend the destination to others (Spenceley et al., 2002).

Tourism is considered an agent for transforming lives, if it is designed in a sustainable way, by assuring meaningful contributions towards the local economy, society, and environment (UNEP, 2010). Lack of proper tourism planning and governance cause many social, economic, and environmental issues. It calls for an approach that aims at better Quality of Life (QOL) of destination community, providing genuine experiences to tourists, and active stakeholder participation. It
is equally important to ensure the role of business enterprises toward sustainable destination management.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overall objective of this work was to study the linkages among Responsible Tourism practices, perceptions on Destination Sustainability dimensions, and Quality of Life (QOL) domains of local residents in tourism destinations. The following objectives were set to achieve the overall objective:

- To study the role of Responsible Tourism practices on the perceptions of Sustainability dimensions (Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental) of tourism destinations and the corresponding Quality of Life (QOL) domains (Material well-being, Community well-being, Emotional well-being, and Health Safety well-being) of local residents in tourism destinations of Kerala.
- To study the effects of Destination Sustainability dimensions on the corresponding Quality of Life (QOL) domains of local communities in tourism destinations of Kerala.
- To study the Responsible Tourism practices in destinations and hospitality accommodation units in Kerala.
1.4. **SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH**

This study was intended to posit a structural relationship among Responsible Tourism practices, Destination Sustainability dimensions, and Quality of Life (QOL) domains of local residents in tourism destinations. Though the concept of Destination Sustainability is wide and comprises of multiple dimensions, this study was considered only four dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, cultural and environmental, based on thorough theoretical underpinnings. Even though these components consist of specific formative indicators, the adopted scale to measure sustainability reflects the perception of stakeholders. The case of Quality of Life (QOL) is also broad and consists of various domains. This study considered only four QOL domains: material well-being, community well-being, emotional well-being, and health and safety well-being, considering their well-established relationship with tourism impacts (Kim, 2008).

Even though the study was in the context of tourism destinations of Kerala, only three destinations viz. Kovalam, Kumarakom, and Thekkady were selected, on the basis of socio-cultural, economic and environmental criteria. In measuring Responsible Business practices of accommodation units, the same locations have been taken into consideration.

The prevailing issues at destinations cast a cloud over the future of many tourism destinations all over the world. Against this background, the study recommends a few policy suggestions that may help the government, the tourism industry and
various other stakeholders to climb the ladders of sustainable destination management.

1.5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

As tourism becomes more community-oriented; the findings of this study may help in promoting sustainable tourism. A structural model was designed in view of the needs of tourism planners to develop not only short-term plans, but also long-term plans focusing on the perspectives of residents’ QOL and sustainable tourism management.

As people look for constructive contributions from the industry, the study endeavors to develop an indicator framework on Responsible Business which will be highly useful for academicians, industry members, and other stakeholders. The scale was developed after a comprehensive content analysis and pilot test, and hence consists of all the potential sustainability indicators. The developed tool/index can be used by diverse stakeholders to measure, suggest and guide responsible activities of the tourism industry.

When the whole world is deliberating the matter of sustainable development, and people consider tourism as a tool for local development, it needs to be a practical and viable concept. In this scenario, the present study provides valuable contributions to tourism planners, developers, policymakers and those who are interested in making a meaningful change in society.
1.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Though the study was on the impact of Responsible Tourism, it was not on the exact project named “Responsible Tourism Initiative, Govt. of Kerala”. It was based on the perceptions of the community towards tourism which were measured as per the Responsible Tourism guidelines.

2. The concept of Destination Sustainability consists of multiple dimensions. But the study considered only four key dimensions - environment, social, cultural and economic concerns.

3. The measurement of sustainability has not been on the basis of actual scores of formative indicators, but on the perceptions of local residents toward the corresponding dimensions.

4. Though the views of tourists were also important, the present study considered responses from local residents as they are well aware of the destination conditions. Also, this decision was on the basis of strong theoretical support; community QOL being a good predictor of destination development.

5. Tools were developed or adopted to suit the local conditions and destination features. Hence, care should be given while adopting the mentioned scales of the study.

6. Even though, there are multiple approaches for assessing Responsible Business, comprehensive views from diverse stakeholders are essential in reaching a final conclusion. The present study had used a self-reporting method to measure the construct. As the respondents were top level officers, they could provide information in consultation with the corresponding personnel.

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