

# People Development Practices and Tourism Delivery Performance: A Study with Special Reference to Public Sector Tourism Agencies in Kerala

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## Introduction

Tourism the act of travel for the purposes of leisure, pleasure, or business, and the provision of services for this act, is an important catalyst in the global and regional level development in the modern world. When tourism is practiced in responsible and sustainable manner, it brings the peace and prosperity to its stakeholders. Globally, an ever increasing number of destinations have opened up and invested in tourism development, turning modern tourism into a key driver of socio-economic progress. It is the main source of foreign exchange for one – third of developing countries and one - half of each Least Developed Countries (LDCs), where it accounts for up to 40 per cent of their GDP (Ministry of tourism GoI,2011).

India's ancient civilization, cultural diversity, unmatched heritage sites and other cultural manifestations have allured the tourists through ages and would continue to be its prime tourism resources. Tourism has the capacity to capitalize on the country's success in the service sector and provide sustainable models of growth. Kerala a small state situated on the south western part of India is a unique tourist spot with its varied culture, geography and topography. By the early 2000s, tourism developed into a fully-fledged, multi-billion dollar industry in the state. The State is now projected as India's tourism super brand.

Today, tourists can travel anywhere in the world. Their choices of destinations are essentially unlimited. Faced with this abundance, the expected or perceived quality of the experience takes on more importance as a choice factor. In a sense, the competition for our leisure travel time and money is intensifying. Though, Kerala tourism is claimed as a pioneering success in destination marketing in the volatile world of tourism, only a small percentage (11.81% in 2010) of international tourists coming to India visits Kerala. Since tourism is a highly competitive industry and a number of States in India are working hard to strengthen their position in the field of tourism, achieving more shares in domestic

and international tourism is a great challenge for the State.

Tourism industry which consists of various sectors such as accommodation, food and beverages, transportation and recreation, as well as associated distribution and sales services, is nurtured by public and private sector. In comparison with other industries, tourism is considered to be the most sensitive service industry where meeting of different cultures take place. A tourist can have a successful trip only with the help of a number of people. The positive or negative feedback on a service or destination depends very much on the people interacting with tourists. Since tourism is a very much people based industry where one group of people (host) serve other group (guest), the significance of people factor is to be well acknowledged while designing and developing the marketing mix. The interactions and relationships between these 'people' groups will impact significantly on the level of product satisfaction experienced by the visitor, the satisfaction of the employee and the degree to which tourism is either accepted or rejected in the host destination.

## Statement of the Problem

Tourism is revered as 'people industry' (Morrison, 1989). It is a service industry that is highly dependent on the hospitality offered to tourists by the hosts. In tourism industry each visitor is considered as a guest and each person serving him or her is the host. The host is responsible for creating and delivering service at the same time the guest is enjoy the service (Christine & Daniel, 1995). Therefore, in tourism industry, the personnel who attend tourists such as hotel receptionists, resort representatives, hotel waiters, bar staff, hotel cleaners, coach drivers and airline cabin crews form an essential ingredient of the product (Holloway & Plant, 1992). As the tourism product is indivisible from the personnel who deliver the services, no reduction in price would compensate for impolite travel guide, an indecent restaurant waiter and a haughty coach driver (Jha, 2002). Therefore, service people are critical for the success of any tourism organization. The knowledge, skill, appearance, concern, sense of responsibility, attitude, and

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behaviour of host people in tourism service organizations influence the tourists' perceptions of the services. As tourism business is highly linked with the performance of staff, if they perform well the business would thrive (Jha, 2002). Like the host people, the customers also have a role in the delivery of tourism services. Unless the tourists perform their role appropriately, they rarely obtain full value from the service. Therefore, the performance of people who consume the tourism is also crucial for any organization and destination that markets tourism services.

In the federal structure of India, the State is responsible for the development of tourism in the region. Though both public and private sector concerns provide a broad range of tourism products, the tourism industry can grow only under the umbrella of the government. Large and reputed private enterprises, especially in organized sector may take keen interest in managing their personnel by selecting right kind of people and by designing effective training programmes to equip them to deliver quality services. Though, in India, especially in Kerala, the public sector tourism agencies play a great role in providing physical facilities and services to tourists visiting the State, there are apprehensions that they do not pursue a consistent approach in developing professionalism and behavioural skills in their people who deliver services (Sudheer, 1992). Here the agencies also fail to educate or sensitize the customers to perform their roles. No doubt Indian tourism industry is at its growth phase. However, to accelerate the growth of tourism in the State, the public sector tourism agencies should take measures to improve the performance of these two people groups on both the end of service channel. The study titled "People Development Practices and Tourism Delivery Performance: a Study with Special Reference to Public Sector Tourism Agencies in Kerala" empirically investigated this issue.

### Scope of the Study

The concept of people element as given in the literature on service marketing has been used for the study. People element is defined as "all human actors who play a part in service delivery and thus influence the buyers' perceptions: namely, the firm's personnel, the customer and other customers in the service environment" (Zeithaml et.al. 2003). The study is confined to the state of Kerala only. The DoT, GoK, and KTDC limited, which are the public sector agencies exclusively set up for providing tourism services throughout Kerala are covered under the study. Receptionists in the front office in KTDC hotels, waiters in food and beverage services of KTDC restaurants, and tourist information officers and tourist information assistants at tourist information offices of MoT, GoK are considered as people on the supply side of tourism services. Both

domestic and international tourists who avail of tourism services from these service people are the people on the demand side of the tourism services.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To study the prevailing practices of public sector tourism agencies in Kerala for the performance development of their service people at delivery end.
2. To analyse the practices of public sector tourism agencies in Kerala for the performance development of tourists visiting the State.
3. To assess the performance of service people at delivery end of public sector tourism agencies in Kerala.
4. To study the performance of the tourists as responsible customers of tourism sector in Kerala.

### Hypotheses for the Study

1. The satisfaction level of the service people in public sector tourism agencies in Kerala on the organizational practices for developing their service performance is not high.
2. Profile (gender, employment status and service category) of the service people have no statistically significant influence on their level of satisfaction as to organizational practices in the development of the service performance.
3. The level of the public sector practices is not high in developing the performance of tourists with selected measures from the perspective of tourists.
4. The level of the public sector practices is not high in developing performance of tourists with selected measures from the perspective of service people.
5. There is no service category wise difference in the performance of service people in public sector tourism agencies in Kerala from the perspective of tourists.
6. There is no service category wise difference in the performance of service people in public sector tourism agencies in Kerala from their own perspective.
7. There is no factor wise difference in the performance of service people across the categories of services in public sector tourism agencies in Kerala from the perspective of tourists.
8. There is no factor wise difference in the performance of service people across the categories of services in public sector tourism agencies in Kerala from their own perspective.
9. The level of performance of tourists as responsible customers of tourism is not high from the perceptiveness of service people, in terms of activities selected.
10. The level of performance as responsible customers of tourism is not high from the perceptiveness of tourists, in terms of activities selected.

## Data and Methodology

### *Research Design*

The study is both descriptive and analytical in nature. The study analyses the extent of practice of select measures by the public sector tourism agencies in Kerala for developing the performance of people involved in tourism delivery. It also examines the performance of the frontline service people and the tourists in the tourism delivery system in Kerala.

### *Data*

As the study is of empirical nature, both primary and secondary data have been used. The primary data have been collected from the sample respondents consisting of frontline service people and tourists by administering structured interview schedules and also by way of non-participatory observations, wherever required. The secondary data have been collected from the records and official publications of the KTDC, ITDC, DoT at Union and the State Government levels, books, periodicals, reports and the reliable internet sources.

### *Sampling and Method of Survey*

The study consists of two population groups; service people and tourists. Multi-stage sampling has been adopted in the study. Firstly, those districts which recorded a minimum of five per cent growth in respect of both domestic and foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 (the year which recorded the maximum tourist arrivals in Kerala before global recession), over previous year have been selected. The districts so selected are Thiruvanthapuram, Alappuzha, Idukki, Ernakulam, and Wynad. 17 of the 31 hotels promoted by KTDC in tourism market of Kerala located in the districts have been selected for the study. Further, of these, five premium or heritage hotels and five non premium hotels under the brands 'budget' and 'tamarind' hotels located in the popular tourism spots in these districts have been selected for the survey. Of the total 25 TIOs of the Department of Tourism of Government of Kerala, 14 are located in these five districts. All these have been selected for the study.

The sample sizes of the populations for the study have been fixed at 375 tourists and 80 service people. Tourists have been arbitrarily apportioned between domestic and foreign in the ratio of 2:1. The researcher surveyed the tourists who stayed at KTDC hotels and also the tourists who availed the direct services of TIOs at the prime tourist centres in the districts where both KTDC hotels and tourist information offices are located. Only those tourists who are at least on the second day of their tour itinerary in Kerala have been surveyed. The researcher has contacted the respondents at their work place and collected the responses from 30 hotel receptionists and restaurant waiters each and

20 tourist information staff on a random basis by giving representation to all the districts selected.

### *Tools of Analysis*

For the purpose of analysis, descriptive statistical tools such as percentage, measures of central tendency (mean and median), and measures of dispersion (range) have been used. As most part of data is of categorical nature, for inferential analysis of the data prominent non-parametric tools such as Chi-square test, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis H test and Binomial test have been used.

## Limitations of the Study

1. The secondary data on tourism available from various published and unpublished sources have been of divergent in nature which caused difficulty in analysing and interpreting the results.
2. The reluctance and half-heartedness of some of the tourist respondents participated in the survey was a serious limitation.
3. The indifferent attitude of a few officials in the tourism agencies also affected the selection of sample respondents from the part of both tourists and service people.
4. As the study is on qualitative concepts, the corresponding measurement variables identified have been analysed with non-parametric tools which have their own limitations.

## Major Findings of the Study

### *Developing Performance of the Service People*

In order to analyse the practices of public sector tourism agencies of Kerala for the performance development of their service people the study measured the level of satisfaction of service people on select performance development variables.

### *Satisfaction of service people on performance development variables*

For analyzing the satisfaction of service people on the performance development of their service people, the study has first identified ten variables namely recruitment, functional skill development, social skill development, working hours, compensation, recognition of good service, team work, grievance handling, infrastructural support and the functioning of trade union. The selection of these variables has been made under the frame work of detailed review of literature.

- On investigating the level of satisfaction of service people on the practices of public sector tourism agencies of Kerala for the performance development of their service people, it is found that service people are not having high satisfaction with eight of the ten variables selected. The level of satisfaction of service

people has found high only in the case of working hours (78%) and team work (65%).

- Gender wise analysis of variables selected, excluding the working hours and team work (majority having high satisfaction) shows that in none of the cases the majority of female have high satisfaction; while the majority of their counterpart are having high satisfaction on variables namely recognition of services and infrastructural support. In respect grievance handling the proportion of females (31.6%) having low level satisfaction is very much greater than the proportion of their counterpart (3.3%). Inferential analysis also confirms the statistical significance of group wise difference in respect of the variables namely recognition of good service, grievance handling and infrastructural support.
- Employment status wise data shows that the contract people are found more satisfied with many of the variables compared to other service people groups. Chi-Square analysis confirms the association between employment status and satisfaction of service people towards seven variables namely recruitment, functional skill development, social skill development, compensation, recognition of good service, team work, and infrastructural support.
- Service category wise analysis indicates a cross sectional variation among the service people groups in terms of their level of satisfaction as to the variables selected. Statistical significance of such group wise variation is evident in respect of variables namely recruitment, functional skill development, social skill development, infrastructural support and functioning of traded union.

#### *Measures for Developing Performance of Tourists*

The perceptions of service people and tourist groups on the practice of eighteen selected measures by the State level public sector tourism agencies in developing the performance of tourists visiting Kerala have been collected on a five point scale. These measures focusing on three different dimensions namely 'usage of tourism resources', 'tourist safety' and 'conserving environment' have been inferentially analysed with Binomial test and Mann-Whitney U Test.

#### *Measures towards Usage of Tourism Resources*

The perceptions of people groups on the select five measures namely 'educating tourists on tourism resources at TIOs', providing 'signboards at destinations', 'motivate constructive dealings among tourists', 'motivation for early tour arrangements' and 'system of collecting feedback', have been analysed under the construct 'usage of tourism resources'. Majority of both categories of tourists perceive all the selected measures as low to

moderate. When the study analyses the overall perception score of the people groups with regard to these measures, each of the people group perceives the extent of public sector practices at a low to moderate. Binomial test confirms the statistical validity of the descriptive results. Inferential results produced by Mann-Whitney U test have proved the cross sectional variations in perceptions in terms of difference in mean scores.

#### *Measures towards Tourist Safety*

With regard to measures towards tourist safety, majority of the service people perceive all the measures except 'safety guidelines at tour sites by executives' at low to moderate. But on considering the tourists' opinions, both categories of tourists perceive all the measures at low to moderate. The Binomial test results justify these descriptive results. Pair wise comparison by Mann-Whitney U test reveals that there is significant difference in perceptions between foreign and domestic tourists and between the foreign tourists and service people with regard to measures towards tourist safety.

#### *Measures towards Conserving Environment*

When the study analyses measures towards conserving environment, at least 50 percent of sample service people perceive that the public sector tourism agencies have only moderate or below level of practice of all the six measures selected. Majority of both foreign and domestic tourists have also expressed this opinion. The intra group analysis of perceptions of different people groups corroborate that none of people group chosen for the study perceive the extent of public sector practice in developing performance of tourists with the selected measures for conserving environment as high. Further the inter group comparison of the perception of people groups in this regard with Mann-Whitney U test reveals that there is significant difference in mean perceptions between foreign and domestic tourists and between foreign tourists and service people.

#### *Performance of Service People in Tourism Services Delivery*

Performance of three groups of service people has been evaluated separately from their own perspective and also from the perspective of tourists. For this, two set of factors or attributes have been identified – vocational attributes and behavioural attributes – through a multivariate analysis frame work ie exploratory factor analysis.

#### *Vocational Attributes*

Basic job skill, communication in language known to tourists, positive body gestures while interacting and personal hygiene and grooming constitute vocational attributes for the study. From the descriptive statistics it is evident that the degree of tourists' satisfaction is the highest in respect of

reception services and the least in respect of tourist information services. Statistical evidence for the difference in satisfaction level of tourist groups towards various service delivery centres is provided by Kruskal-Wallis H test. Further, while the Mann-Whitney U test confirms the difference of opinions between service people and domestic tourists in all the cases; the same result in comparison of opinions between foreign tourists and service people is obtained in respect of reception and tourist information services. Similarly, it is also found from the overall analysis that when people working at restaurants and TIOs over rate their services at a scale higher than that done by the tourists, the reverse result is visible in respect of hotel reception service.

#### *Behavioural Attributes*

Factor named 'behavioural attributes' is comprised of six attributes namely politeness in dealings, sincerity in solving tourists' problems, patience in understanding tourist needs, willingness to help beyond service limit, un biased service, and sense of humour in dealings. The difference of opinions of tourist groups as to behavioural attributes in services delivered across the different service categories is statistically validated by inferential test results. The results also reveal that the service people irrespective of category they belong to rate their services at a level higher than those perceived by tourist groups. The gap in perceptions among all pairs of people groups under consideration is substantiated statistically in respect of tourism information service. The test results also provide empirical evidence for the divergent opinions between domestic tourists and each of the other two service people groups. Similarly, it is also statistically validated that except in the case of restaurant service as rated by domestic tourists, in all other cases both tourist groups have only a lower level of satisfaction on behavioural attributes of service people as compared to vocational attributes.

#### *Performance of Tourists in Tourism*

Study has analysed the performance of tourists in tourism with three dimensional variables namely: activities towards tour preparation, activities towards self benefit/safety during their trip and activities towards environmental conservation during their tour. The opinions on eighteen tourist actions under these three variables have been collected and analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### *Tour Preparation Activities*

The performance of tourists in tour preparation in the study covers three activities namely, 'seek information on Kerala through print media', 'seek information on Kerala through electronic media' and 'advance booking of services'. Domestic tourists' involvement

in tour preparation activities is rated as low to moderate by the majority of service people groups and by themselves. The measures taken by the foreign tourists in connection with their tour preparations is perceived high by the service people, except in respect of the 'seek information on Kerala through print media'. Binomial test results validate the descriptive findings barring the performance of foreign tourists from their perception. Again, Mann-Whitney-U test gives proof for the statistically significant difference between foreign and domestic tourists in their tour preparation activities from the perspective of service people.

#### *Self benefit/safety Activities during Tour*

The study has identified nine activities taken by tourists for ensuring own safety/benefit namely 'adhere the directions of tour site officials, 'consider the signboards at destinations', 'avoid disturbing other tourists', 'precautions at aqua tour centers', 'avail the services of approved guides', 'constructive dealings with other tourists', 'obey the police officials at tour spots', 'depend TIOs during trip' and 'give feedback on services'. The overall perception of each people group towards this aspect is measured as above moderate and the same has been validated by binomial test results. However, pair wise analysis of test results has indicated statistically significant difference in performance between two tourist groups both from their own perspectives and from the perspective of service people.

#### *Environmental Conservation Activities*

Tourists' responsible performance in conserving environment is assessed in terms of six activities namely 'conservation of natural resources', 'avoid smoking and consuming alcohol at public places', 'dropping litter in bins', 'cooperation to enforce plastic ban', 'self-reporting infectious diseases', and 'respect local culture and natives'. Descriptive results of analysis indicate evenness in perceptions of both tourist groups towards their performance with positive rating (high) on four of the six activities considered. Service people's perception towards initiatives of the domestic tourists in conserving environment is found low to moderate in respect of all the variables identified, when their perception towards foreign tourists is matching with the self-rating of that group. The perceptions of people groups reflected in descriptive analysis are reinforced by the binomial test results. The difference in performance of two tourist groups is again revalidated by Mann-Whitney-U test results.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The empirical analysis which performed in the study identifies the need for more initiatives and efforts from the part of public sector tourism agencies in Kerala to develop the service delivery performance

of the people element at the supply side of the industry. Even though, the people providing services in the tourism industry perform relatively well with their vocational and behavioural attributes, some level of modification is still demanded, especially at the behavioural aspects of tourist information service people. Governmental involvement in making the tourists as the responsible customer base of the sector is yet to be improved.

More activities to improve tourists' awareness on environmental conservation, to guide and support tourists for making advance tour preparations, and to provide better support for tourists' safety may bring improved results for the sustainable tourism development in the country. For attaining these results, the study proposes some specific suggestions before the authorities who are responsible for the tourism promotion in Kerala.