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Understanding eco-tourists' behavior: An analysis of motivational and influencing factors in Kollam District, Kerala

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Abstract
This study explores the motivational and influencing factors of eco-tourists in Kollam District, Kerala. Eco-tourism is a rapidly growing sector that promotes environmentally responsible travel. Understanding eco-tourists' behavior is crucial for sustainable development. This analysis examines the primary and secondary factors influencing eco-tourists' destination choices. Key factors include natural environment, climate, historical sites, and scenic views. Socio-economic, environmental, and technological factors also play a significant role. The study highlights the importance of information and satisfaction in eco-tourism marketing. The findings will be useful for tourism practitioners, service providers, and industry professionals.

Keywords: Eco-tourism, sustainable development, motivational factors, influencing factors, Kollam district, Kerala

Introduction

Education is the soul factor responsible for the effective development of a nation. Education aims to build human resources for the nation. This particular aim of education One of the tourism industries' concepts with the quickest rate of growth is ecotourism. Traveling to places of natural beauty and attraction that are environmentally conscious and responsible is known as ecotourism. Nature-based tourism and eco-tourism are interchangeable terms (Jose Manuel, 2024). Increasing the tourism industry's capacity and the caliber of its offerings while preserving the environment is the challenge facing ecotourism in each nation or area. Visitors' expectations and perceptions of ecotourism destinations, as well as their behavior, are crucial for sustainable development, which aids stakeholders in organizing and overseeing the amenities and services provided at ecotourism destinations (Farrukh Rafiq *et al*., 2022) [3].

Since ecotourism offers a genuine look into daily living, it can improve visitor experiences and attract more travelers to ecotourism locations. Ecotourism destinations incorporate education and care for the places that visitors visit, and the preservation of natural, cultural, and historical sites, customs, and traditions remain distinctive to the destination. Land suitability study for ecotourism sites and activities is a complex decision-making process, and there are many elements influencing eco-tourists' behavior when choosing an ecotourism location. Even though ecotourism is a rapidly expanding sector, it might be difficult to get information about trips to various ecotourism sites. Technological, environmental, and socioeconomic considerations are the main forces behind change in the tourism sector. In general, family, friends, cultural values, personal preferences, safety, and destination-related advertisements all play a role in eco-tourists' decision to visit a particular ecotourism site.

A visitor's choice of ecotourism destinations, as well as their experience and satisfaction with the facilities and features in those places, are influenced by a number of factors, including occupation, travel companion, income, information source, the quality of amenities and services, and the ecotourism activities they choose. These elements can be divided into two categories: major and secondary. The main elements are typically the main draws of a place, such as the climate, the natural environment, historical sites, religious sports, ecology, geographic circumstances, scenic sites, viewpoints, and the opportunity to engage in a variety of ecotourism activities. Things like hotels, guest homes, home stays, shopping centers, transportation adventurous activities, theme parks, sports grounds, etc. that are constructed or developed especially for the purpose of promoting tourism or the development of the area can be categorized as secondary factors.

In this perspective, the function of knowledge in ecotourism marketing and eco-tourists' pleasure is crucial. Before deciding to visit a place for the first time, eco-tourists go through every step of the decision-making process and conduct a thorough information search. Only a portion of the stages and a restricted search for information are experienced by eco-tourists who have previously visited the location. The family, friends, societal values, preferences, safety and security, accessibility to transit, particularly the regularity of public transportation, lodging, and promotions are some of the variables that influence eco-tourists' choice of ecotourism location.

The stakeholders in the ecotourism industry must work to meet the expectations of eco-tourists and analyze the factors influencing the decision-making process regarding the selection of visit to eco-tourism destinations in order to maintain the flow of eco-tourists to various eco-tourist destinations and revenue in the ecotourism industry. To maintain the growth and vitality of ecotourism in the area, these variables must be examined on a regular basis. The factors impacting the choice of ecotourism sites and activities will be better understood in this context thanks to this analysis, which will also be helpful for travelers, travel service providers, and tourism industry professionals.

Review of Literature

Mrigaksh *et al*., (2024) [1] investigated and analysed the decisive factors that affect tourists' environmentally responsible behaviour in tourism sites. The relationship

between perceived value (PV), ecotourism intention (EI), satisfaction (S) and environmentally responsible tourist behaviour (TB) were discussed in the study. The research sample consists of the visitors of Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of India. The survey used convenience sampling methods with 189 domestic tourists and then analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The results establish that perceived value and ecotourism intention directly affect environmentally responsible behaviour. However, satisfaction does not have any impact on responsible behaviour of tourists, which suggests that satisfied tourists do not necessarily mean responsible tourists and a more strategic approach is needed to be developed.

Jose Manuel (2024) [2] examined Travelers may now actively support environmental protection while having a great time on their trips thanks to the growing trend of eco-tourism. This study aims to examine, while accounting for pro-environmental behavior, the effects of digital green marketing and visitors environmental attitudes on their willingness to return to eco-destinations. In addition, the hypothesis was investigated in this work using the structural equation model (SEM). The study's findings suggest that visitors' attitudes about the environment and digital green marketing have a positive influence on their environmental behavior. Moreover, it has been found that tourists' intentions to return are positively impacted by their ecologically conscious conduct. Studies have indicated that travelers' intentions to return to eco-destinations are significantly influenced by their pro-environmental conduct.

Farrukh Rafiq et.al., (2022) [3] examined in his study, personality traits' role in ecotourism has rarely been studied, this study tested a unique research model. This study integrates extraversion and neuroticism with environmental concern and ecotourism intention to examine personality characteristics in adopting ecotourism. Additionally, our study addresses one of the major issues in eco-friendly tourism, such as the concern-behavior gap. It introduced environmental concern as a mediator between personality traits (extraversion/neuroticism) and ecotourism intention. Introducing environmental concerns to neurotic tourists indicates that they will visit ecotourism.

Sujood et.al., (2021) [4] The purpose of this study is to investigate consumers' intentions to visit eco-friendly destinations for tourism experiences by developing an integrated structural model that incorporates the TPB model with an additional construct, i.e. environmental friendly activities (EFA). Data was collected via a web-based survey and then analyzed. The related hypotheses have been tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The sample consists of 471 responses from Indian consumers. The findings reveal that attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and environmental friendly activities are significant predictors of intention. These constructs explained approximately 50 percent of the variance in the intention. The results of this study contribute to the body of the knowledge of intention, eco-friendly destinations, and tourism experiences and also provide useful information for developing effective marketing strategies to encourage consumers to visit eco-friendly destinations for tourism experiences. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this was the first attempt to predict the intention to visit eco-friendly destinations for tourism experiences by employing TPB along with the EFA construct.

Uma and Abhay (2018) [5] analysed Recognizing the growth and importance of ecotourism in the tourism sector with special reference to Thenmala Ecotourism in Kerala was the primary objective of this research. Kerala is not only renowned for its various natural herbal remedies, but also for its "mesmerizing beauty." The objective of this study is to evaluate the potential it has to generate a high volume of tourists that will eventually help generate good income. Thenmala is a classic example of protecting the country's flora and fauna. This research will help bridge the gap between the theoretical and realistic approach to ecotourism. Knowledge about local's attitude towards tourists can also be obtained through this research. Most of the tourists visit Kerala because of Thenmala as they learn about the place mostly through friends and social media. Natural environment of Thenmala lures many tourists towards it and in turn there is a significant increase in the popularity of the state also. More and more tourists are contributing economy of the place. The increased economy and tourism are providing jobs and other help to the locals which has improved their living standards. The locals are helpful towards the tourists. Ecotourism affects its flora and fauna very well. All the visitors were very pleased with the ecotourism of Thenmala.

Objectives of The Study

Though the main objective of the present study is to identify the tourists' perception about eco-tourism, the following is the specific objective,

- To identify the factors influencing the selection of eco-tourism spots in The Kollam.

Research Methodology

The present study is an empirical research purely based on primary data. As population is infinite, it is decided to use snow ball sampling technique under non-probability sampling method.

Motivational Factors of Eco Tourists- Kendalls Coefficient of Concordance ('W')

Eco-tourists are motivated by a desire to experience and appreciate the natural beauty of a destination. They seek to explore and learn about the local wildlife, and enjoy outdoor adventures such as hiking, camping, and water sports. Many eco-tourists are also driven by a desire for cultural immersion, seeking to learn about local cultures, traditions, and ways of life. In addition to these factors, eco-tourists are often motivated by a sense of environmental conservation and social responsibility. They seek to support conservation efforts and contribute to the protection of the environment, while also supporting local communities and contributing to their economic development. Eco-tourists also value unique and unforgettable experiences, and seek to challenge themselves and promote personal growth. Overall, eco-tourists are motivated by a complex array of factors, including a love of nature, a desire for adventure and cultural immersion, and a sense of environmental and social responsibility. By understanding these motivations, tourism operators and destinations can tailor their offerings to meet

the needs and expectations of eco-tourists, while also promoting sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

The sample tourists are asked to prioritize the motivational reasons in the questionnaire. Using the values that the sample tourists assigned, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance test was used to determine which factors were most impacted. To determine an overall ranking of the elements influencing the sample tourists' visits to ecotourism, the total rank score provided by the sample tourists is added up for each question, and an average score for all questions is calculated. A study of the sample eco tourists' motivating elements is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1: Motivational Factors of Eco Tourists - Kendalls Coefficient of Concordance ('W')

S.No.	Motivational Factors	Mean Score	Rank	Kendall's Coefficient
1	Need to break away from their everyday routine.	3.86	1	0.93
2	Features of the destination	3.70	2	
3	The affordability of comfort and cost	3.36	4	
4	Distinct local characteristics	3.30	5	
5	Cultural elements	3.28	6	
6	Security and safety	3.55	3	

Table 1.1 demonstrates that, according to Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (or "W"), the sample tourists' motivational factors for visiting Kerala's Kollam district were ranked as follows: 'Need to break away from their everyday routine (3.86), 'Features of the destination' (3.70), 'Security and safety (3.55), 'The affordability of comfort and cost' (3.36), 'Distinct local characteristics' (3.30), and 'Cultural elements' (3.28) Given that the computed value of "W" is 0.93 and greater than 0.5, it can be said that there is a considerable correlation between the sample tourists' rankings for various motivating reasons and their ranks.

Influencing Factors of Eco Tourists Visiting Eco Tourism Destinations of The Kollam District

Because of the fierce competition in our world, tourists choose their destinations carefully. There must be underlying aspects that assist travelers in selecting a location that will provide them with a great deal of satisfaction if they want to rank top on the list of popular tourist destinations. Kerala's ecotourism district is Kollam District, specifically the region around Thenmala, which is India's first planned ecotourism destination. Located in the foothills of the Western Ghats, Thenmala offers a unique blend of natural beauty, adventure activities, and cultural experiences.

The tourists selecting a destination for a specific purpose is intense as we live in a world of heavy competition. There are many tourist spots and in order to be the first on the list, there must be underlying factors that help the tourists choose a spot that will give them immense satisfaction. Tourists visiting eco tourism destinations of The Nilgiris District have various preferences such as transportations facilities, proper sanitation, medical aid, ATM, sign boards, etc. and these factors are taken into consideration in this study. As for the facilities available in Kollam as an eco-tourism destination, there are plenty of options to cater to different interests and preferences.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha is a standard measuring scale to measure the relationship of a set of factors influencing tourists visiting eco tourism destinations of The kollam District. The reliability has been measured by using Cronbach's Alpha values which reflects the internal consistency of the component matrices. The credibility of the statements is represented from 0 to 1. The result of the reliability test analysis is given in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Reliability Test

S.No.	Statements	Scale mean if item deleted	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
1	Accessibility of public transportation, Parking facilities for vehicles, Post signs and show maps	41.567	0.847
2	Facilities for electricity, water supply, sanitation, banks and cash machines, Health and medical facilities, Facilities for communication, waiting areas with shelter and Service for lost and found	41.531	0.798
3	Eco-lodges and their services are available	43.691	0.840
4	Using complaint and information centers	43.342	0.761
5	standards for tourist safety at eco-destinations.	43.321	0.857
6	A unique rule of conduct governing visitors' conduct	41.485	0.846
7	Forest security and police security	43.291	0.825
8	Beautiful scenery, Climate and weather, Outdoor pursuits	41.348	0.810
9	Shopping convenience to obtain unique products	41.432	0.722
10	Locals', tour guides', and tour operators' attitudes and their hospitality	42.596	0.782
	Mean	42.965	
	Variance	37.384	
	Standard Deviation	8.495	
	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	0.835	
	Cronbach's Alpha	0.835	
	Number of items	10	

From the above Table 1.2. observation of the above test, the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.835 and is probably good with utmost reliability. Thus the above mentioned statements are valid for further analysis.

Influencing Factors of Eco Tourists Visiting Eco Tourism Destinations of The Kollam District: Factor Analysis

A statistical technique called factor analysis is used to condense the data in an effort to reflect a number of variables. It is intended to clarify the relationship between several outcomes that can be attributed to one or more possible causes. The main objective of factor analysis, a multivariate mathematical technique, is to methodically simplify a set of connected data. The dimensions used in factor analysis are substantially smaller than those of the original variables. The degree to which the data fits into factor analysis is determined by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test. This test evaluates each variable's validity. The sample adequacy of the KMO test must be more than 0.5. Only the factor analysis can then go to the next stage of processing. The sign strength of the correlation between variables is determined by Bartlett's test.

Table 1.3: KMO And Bartlett's Test

Kaiser –Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling Adequacy		**0.748**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1.850
	DF	45
	Sig.	0.000

The Kaiser–Meyer-Olkin results are shown in Table 1.3. Low test results suggest that there is insufficient correlation between the variables and therefore factor analysis is inappropriate. Since the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.748 is more than 0.5, it is deemed good. Therefore, the factor analysis used in this study is appropriate and successful. The percentage of each variable obtained via factor analysis is displayed in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4: Total Variance of Influencing Factors Variable

Component	**Initial Eigen values**			**Extraction sums of squared Loadings**		
	Total	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	10.852	51.854	51.854	9.742	51.854	51.854
2	2.596	0.532	52.386	2.863	4.386	56.24
3	2.951	0.476	52.862	2.496	3.568	59.808
4	2.957	0.375	53.237			
5	2.465	1.961	55.198			
6	1.946	2.493	57.691			
7	2.194	2.861	60.552			
8	1.395	5.852	66.404			
9	1.304	5.327	71.731			
10	0.492	7.257	78.988			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

From Table 1.4, it is observed that only 3 statements have Eigen value of more than 1 and the variance of the 3 statements is 51.854%, 4.386% and 3.568%. The cumulative variance is 51.854%, 56.24% and 59.808% respectively. Table 1.5 shows the component matrix of influencing factors.

Table 1.5: Component Matrix of Influencing Factors Variables

S. No	**Factors**	**Component**		
		1	**2**	**3**
1	Accessibility of public transportation, Parking facilities for vehicles, Post signs and show maps	0.385	0.257	0.532
2	Facilities for electricity, water supply, sanitation, banks and cash machines, Health and medical facilities, Facilities for communication, waiting areas with shelter and Service for lost and found	0.581	0.492	0.692
3	Eco-lodges and their services are available	0.481	0.193	0.597
4	Using complaint and information centers	0.485	0.184	0.597
5	standards for tourist safety at eco-destinations.	0.496	0.486	0.596
6	A unique rule of conduct governing visitors' conduct	0.105	0.275	0.101
7	Forest security and police security	0.104	0.432	0.743
8	Beautiful scenery, Climate and weather, Outdoor pursuits	0.932	0.593	0.867
9	Shopping convenience to obtain unique products	0.657	0.497	0.895
10	Locals', tour guides', and tour operators' attitudes and their hospitality	0.693	0.583	0.394

The component loading, which represents the correlations between the variables and the components, is displayed in Table 1.5. This is the main result of the principal component or factor analysis, and it can serve as the foundation for assigning labels to the many component factors. It is common practice to prioritize the greater size of the component loading for a variable when interpreting a component.

Table 1.6: Rotated Component Matrix of Influencing Factors Variable

S.NO	Factors	Component		
		1	2	3
1	Accessibility of public transportation, Parking facilities for vehicles, Post signs and show maps	0.532	0.257	0.385
2	Facilities for electricity, water supply, sanitation, banks and cash machines, Health and medical facilities, Facilities for communication, waiting areas with shelter and Service for lost and found	0.743	0.432	0.104
3	Eco-lodges and their services are available	0.597	0.193	0.481
4	Using complaint and information centers	0.398	0.697	0.473
5	standards for tourist safety at eco-destinations.	0.352	0.507	0.305
6	A unique rule of conduct governing visitors' conduct	0.424	0.503	0.283
7	Forest security and police security	0.133	0.673	0.294
8	Beautiful scenery, Climate and weather, Outdoor pursuits	0.486	0.454	0.952
9	Shopping convenience to obtain unique products	0.583	0.597	0.862
10	Locals', tour guides', and tour operators' attitudes and their hospitality	0.254	0.456	0.687

Table 1.6 reveals that the above stated statements are in order of degree of importance. The 10 statements are reduced to three factors based on the components' value and grouped under an identified factor name shown in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7: Influencing Factors

S. No	Components	Factors	Identified factor name
1	Accessibility of public transportation, Parking facilities for vehicles, Post signs and show maps	Factor I	Amenities & Facilities
2	Facilities for electricity, water supply, sanitation, banks and cash machines, Health and medical facilities, Facilities for communication, waiting areas with shelter and Service for lost and found		
3	Eco-lodges and their services are available		
4	Using complaint and information centres	Factor II	Safety & Security
5	Standards for tourist safety at eco-destinations.		
6	A unique rule of conduct governing visitors' conduct		
7	Forest security and police security		
8	Beautiful scenery, Climate and weather, Outdoor pursuits	Factor III	Nature Based & Behavioural Aspects
9	Shopping convenience to obtain unique products		
10	Locals', tour guides', and tour operators' attitudes and their hospitality		

Table 1.7. exhibits the 10 statements comprised into three factors and an identified factor name is given for each group. Factor 1 is labeled as 'Amenities & Facilities' and it contains Accessibility of public transportation, Parking facilities for vehicles, Post signs and show maps, Facilities for electricity, water supply, sanitation, banks and cash machines, Health and medical facilities, Facilities for communication, waiting areas with shelter and Service for lost and found and Eco-lodges and their services are available.

Factor II is labeled as 'Safety & Security' and it contains Standards for tourist safety at eco-destinations, Using complaint and information centers and Forest security and police security.

Factor III is labeled as 'Nature Based & Behavioual Aspects' and it contains Beautiful scenery, Climate and weather, Outdoor pursuits, Shopping convenience to obtain unique products and Locals', tour guides', and tour operators' attitudes and their hospitality.

Findings of the study

The top motivational factors for visiting Kerala's Kollam district are "Need to break away from routine" (3.86), "Destination features" (3.70), and "Security and safety" (3.55), with a Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) of 0.93. The 10 statements were grouped into three factors: 'Amenities & Facilities', 'Safety & Security', and 'Nature Based & Behavioral Aspects', representing the key influencing factors for eco-tourists visiting Kollam District.

Implications

The study's findings have significant implications for stakeholders in the eco-tourism industry, suggesting that tourism practitioners, service providers, and industry professionals should develop strategies to cater to eco-tourists' motivations and expectations, improve amenities and facilities, and promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices to ensure the long-term viability of eco-tourism in Kollam District.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the motivational and influencing factors of eco-tourists in Kollam District, Kerala. The findings highlight the importance of understanding eco-tourists' behavior for sustainable development. The top motivational factors, including "Need to break away from routine", "Destination features", and "Security and safety", and the key influencing factors, namely 'Amenities & Facilities', 'Safety & Security', and 'Nature Based & Behavioral Aspects', offer significant implications for stakeholders in the eco-tourism industry. By catering to eco-tourists' motivations and expectations, improving amenities and facilities, and promoting sustainable and responsible tourism practices, tourism practitioners, service providers, and industry professionals can ensure the long-term viability of eco-tourism in Kollam District, ultimately contributing to the conservation of natural resources and the well-being of local communities.

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