

Thenmala Eco-Tourism: A Study on Impact and Influence on the Local People

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Abstract: *Thenmala, in the Kollam district of the southern Indian state of Kerala is India's first planned ecotourism destination. The present study is an attempt to study the degree of influence of ecotourism to the inhabitants of Thenmala. Primary data is collected from 50 respondents living in Thenmala. The study revealed that tourism creates employment opportunities to the local people and helps in improving the standard of living of them. Inappropriate behaviour of tourists is the main problem faced by them. The study suggests to implement an ecotourism policy, to ensure that ecotourism does not impact biodiversity, lives and governance systems of communities.*

Keywords: *Eco tourism, Thenmala, biodiversity, inhabitants*

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I. Introduction

Tourism can be defined as travelling to a place which is different your home city or country for various leisure or business purposes, and staying there for some considerable period of time at a length. Promotion of tourism is particularly relevant in developing nations like India. International agencies like the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO) have estimated that nations like India and China would become the superpowers in the global tourism map by the year 2020.

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in Kerala. The origin of Kerala Tourism can be traced back to the 1950s, when the state set up a Hospitality Department. Tourism department came into being in the 1960s. The enormous potential of tourism in Kerala was only examined in the 7th plan. Over the last decade the growth of tourism in Kerala has been amazing. Much of its growth is concentrated in natural areas. Kerala is blessed with excellent natural resources, several Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks. These natural geographic advantages give ample scope for ecotourism development in Kerala.

Thenmala, in the Kollam district of the southern Indian state of Kerala is India's first planned ecotourism destination, based on sound principles of ecological sustainability and has become a model for other ecotourism destination development programmes. In the year 1998, the 'Thenmala Ecotourism Society' was established as a Government of Kerala undertaking to promote ecotourism activities at Thenmala and its surroundings with the co-operation of the Forest, Irrigation and Tourism departments. Situated in the Kollam district of Kerala, Thenmala literally translates to 'honey hill'. The region was once very famous for its honey that was believed to have medicinal properties. It has 10 Ecotourism spots that cover the great hill ranges of Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta and Kollam districts.

II. Statement Of The Problem

Ecotourism, a unique subset of the tourism industry, is focused on the enhancement or maintenance of natural systems through tourism. Ecotourism has got an excellent growth potential in India, particularly in states like Kerala, because of the huge demand for ecotourism from foreign tourists.

The present study entitled "Thenmala Eco-Tourism: A Study On Impact And Influence On The Local People" focus on Thenmala eco-tourism project in Kerala. The paper seeks to identify the major problems and benefits of tourism to the locality and its inhabitants.

III. Significance of the Study

Ecotourism in Kerala has gaining worldwide attention because Kerala has many destinations known for their natural beauty and exquisite landscape. Kerala is the pioneer in India to identify the economic potential of tourism and develop it in consonance with the overall socio economic development programmes of the state. By integrating tourism with other development activities and promoting the participation of host community in tourism centres, the state has set strong footing for inclusive growth of tourism for achieving sustainability.

Kerala tourism focuses on the conservation of ecology to reduce the negative impact of tourism on the environment and intends to promote development of tourism based on the carrying capacities of the destination.

In such a situation it is worthwhile to study the impact of tourism on the locality and the local people. Thenmalaeco tourism project is one of the famous tourism sites in Kerala attracting large number of tourists. So the study focus on Thenmalaeco tourism project, its impact on natives of the place.

IV. Scope Of The Study

The study “Thenmala eco-tourism: a study on impact and influence on the local people” is to find out the problems faced by the local people and the tourism spot due to the arrival of large number of tourists to the area. The data is collected only from the local people. The entire study based on the perception of locals towards Thenmalaeco tourism.

V. Objectives Of The Study

The main objective of the study is to find out the impact and influence of Thenmalaeco tourism on the local people. The main objective is to be achieved with the help of the following sub objectives.

1. To study the current status of tourism in terms of employments.
2. To know whether tourism brings development to the place
3. To know the problems faced by natives due to Ecotourism.
4. To assess how tourism affects the standard of living of the local people.

VI. Review of Literature

1. M.V. Vinitha, Sinu Susan Varghese, Sneha Alex (2018) in their study “A Study on Tourists Inclination to Visit Konni” analysed the overall review of tourist preferences and satisfaction on Konni elephant cage and various problem faced by the tourists in Konni. SPSS software was used to analyze the data obtained from the tourists. The scenic beauty or attractiveness of nature and the popularity of the place is the main factors that influence the tourists to visit Konni. The study also revealed that majority of tourists were satisfied with the facilities and potentials in Konni. The researchers suggested that the management should provide more sign boards to reach the destination.
2. Manika Singla (2014): conducted a study entitled "A Case Study on Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism in the city of Jaipur, Rajasthan: India". The paper focused on the community perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of culture and heritage tourism and examines the extent to which they coincide with the tourism impact literature. This study not only deals with socio-cultural impacts perceived by residents as the impacts of tourism development but also identifies the effects of demographic variation on the residents' attitudes towards tourism. Considering the relationship between residents and tourism, the study also tries to analyze this relationship in the context of what residents consider as important: community or personal issues.
3. Shihabudheen N (2012) conducted a study Problems and Prospects of Ecotourism in Kerala: Some Empirical Evidence from 'Kumbalangi' Panchayat In Ernakulam District (India)", to make a case study of the problems and prospects of ecotourism in Kerala mainly focusing at “Kumbalangi” Panchayat in Ernakulam district. The study concluded that because of the excellent prospects of tourism for rapid economic development and that too for ‘tourism resource rich’ state like Kerala, ecotourism and such other sustainable models of tourism have got tremendous growth potential in this state. The policies of the Government has already made ‘Kumbalangi’ a successful ecotourism village in the whole of India
4. Manoj P K, (2010), “Tourism in Kerala: A Study of The Imperatives and Impediments With Focus on Eco-Tourism”, This paper seeks to make a cursory review of the current status of global Indian and Kerala tourism and its broad trends and patterns, with special reference to the growingly significant concept of ecotourism. The paper considered, relevant global and Indian experiences, ever-growing environmental issues relating to tourism, and above all the peculiar socio-economic, geographic and such other characteristic features peculiar to Kerala tourism. The study states that the full potential of tourism of India in general and Kerala in particular are yet to be tapped.

VII. Research Methodology

Data source:

Primary data: To make the study more realistic and accurate, a questionnaire was prepared and administered among 50 natives of Thenmala.

Secondary data: The secondary data chosen for aiding the study are mainly taken from books, journals, documents, websites, and other publication.

Population

Population of the study consist of all the natives in Thenmala

Sampling

For the purpose of selecting the sample convenience sampling is used. 50 natives from Thenmala is selected

Tools Of Analysis

The data is analysed and interpreted with the help of mathematical methods. Simple percentage method is used in analyzing' the data.

Simple percentage = No. of respondents /total no. of respondents *100

VIII. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table No: 1Table showing opinion whether tourism brings development to the place

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	45	90
No	2	4
No opinion	3	6
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: It is clear from the above table that 90% of the respondents are of the opinion that tourism brings development to this place while4%does not think so. Others have opinion in this regard.

Chart No:1 Chartshowing opinion whether tourism brings development to the place

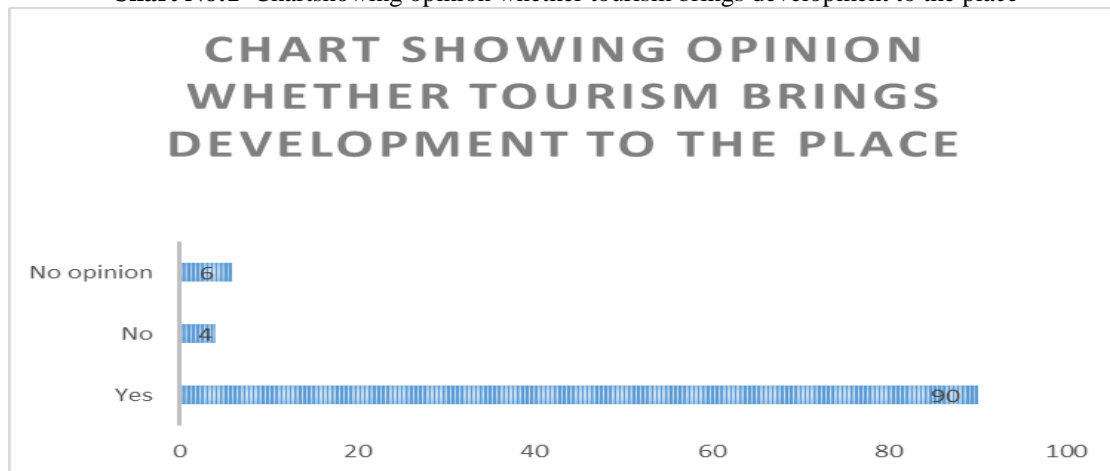


Table No: 2 Table showing opinion whether tourism brings employment opportunities to the local people

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	41	82
No	0	0
No opinion	9	18
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: The above table shows that 82%of the respondents are of the opinion that tourism brings employment opportunities to the local people and 18% of the respondents have no opinion in this regard.

Chart No:2Chart showing opinion whether tourism brings employment opportunities to the local people

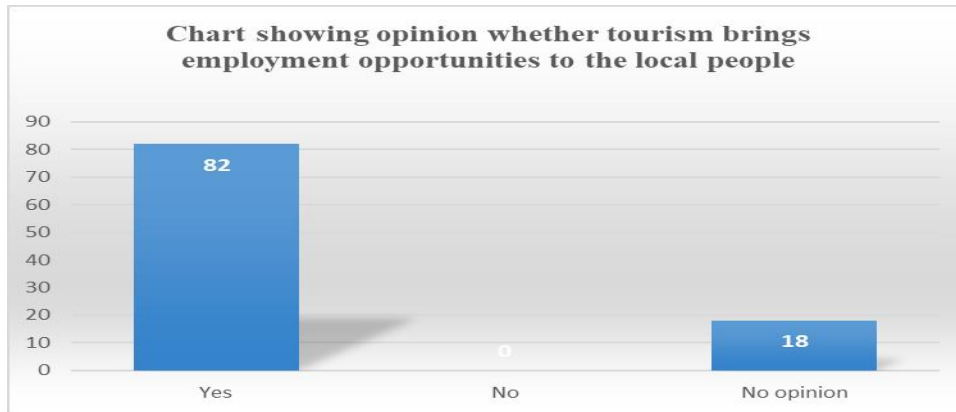


Table No: 3 Table showing opinion whether tourism improves standard of living of the local people

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	39	78
No	7	14
No opinion	4	8
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: 78% of the respondents think that tourism improves the standard of living of the local people while 14% of respondents do not think so. Others have no opinion in this regard

Chart No: 3 Chart showing opinion whether tourism improves standard of living of the local people

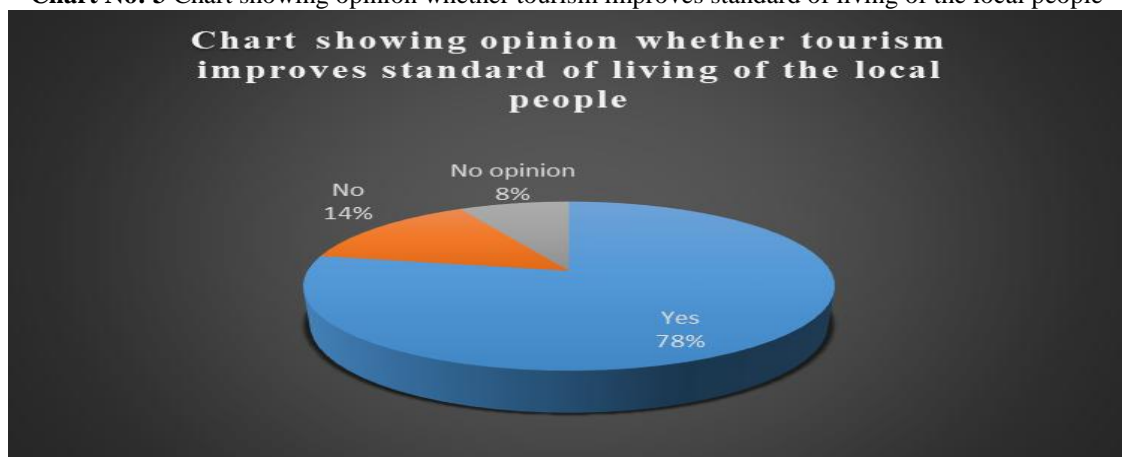


Table No: 4 Table showing opinion whether tourism increases pollution in this area

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	30	60
No	15	30
No opinion	5	10
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: From the above data it is found that 60% of the respondents are of the opinion that tourism increases pollution while 30% are of the opinion that tourism do not increase pollution in the area and 10% have no opinion in this regard.

Chart No: 4 Chart showing opinion whether tourism increases pollution in this area

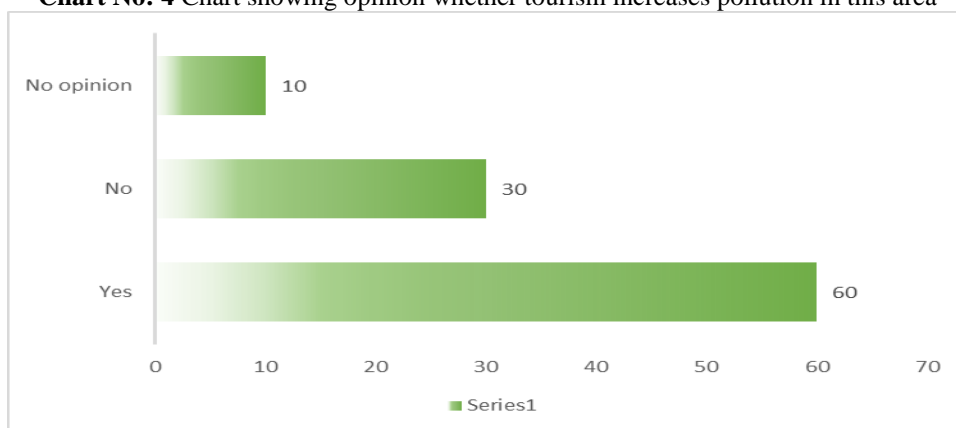


Table No: 5 Table showing opinion whether tourism affects life of the local people adversely

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	12	24
No	24	48
No opinion	14	28
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: 48% of respondents think that tourism does not affect the life of the local people adversely, 28% have no opinion and 24% are of the opinion that tourism adversely affects their life

Chart No:5 Chart showing opinion whether tourism affects life of the local people adversely

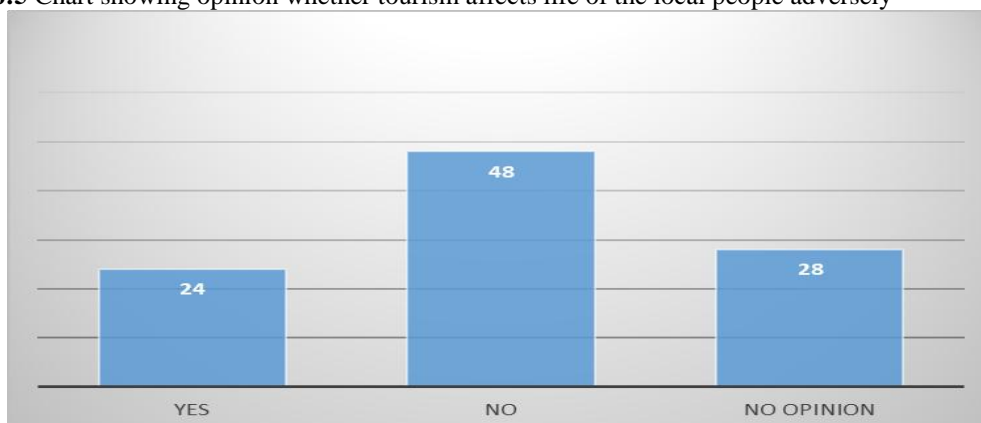


Table no: 6 Table showing whether tourism helps in the conservation of the site

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	38	76
No	3	6
No opinion	9	18
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: It is inferred from the table that 76% of respondents are having the opinion that tourism helps in the conservation of the site. 6% of respondents do not think that tourism results in the conservation of the site. 18% have no opinion.

Chart No:6 Chart showing whether tourism helps in the conservation of the site

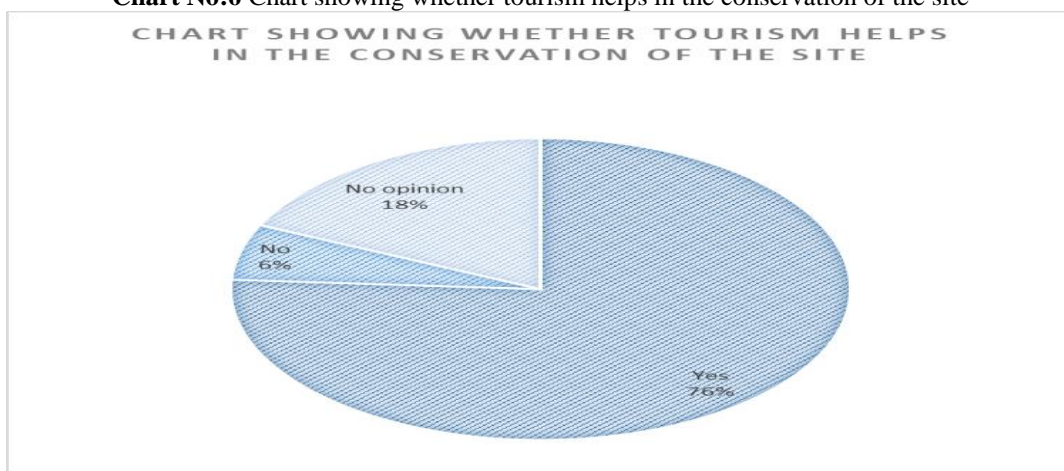


Table No:7 Table showing whether eco tourism helps in cultural exchange

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	43	86
No	5	10
No opinion	2	4
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: Majority of respondents (86%) thinks that eco-tourism helps in cultural exchange while 10% do not think so. Others have no opinion.

Chart No:7 Chart showing whether eco tourism helps in cultural exchange

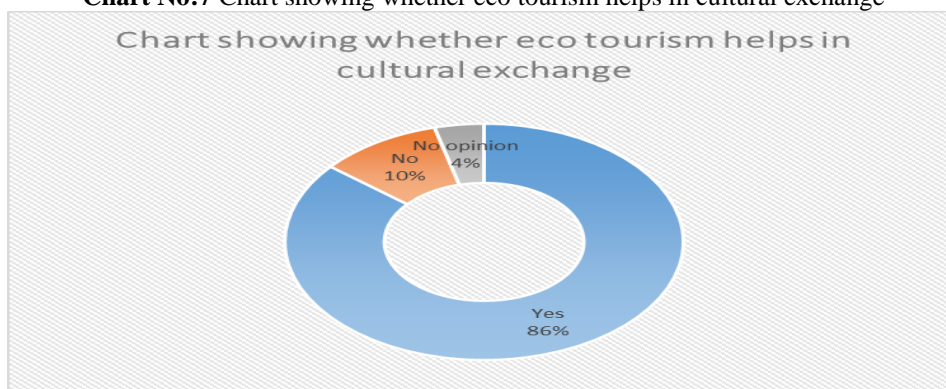


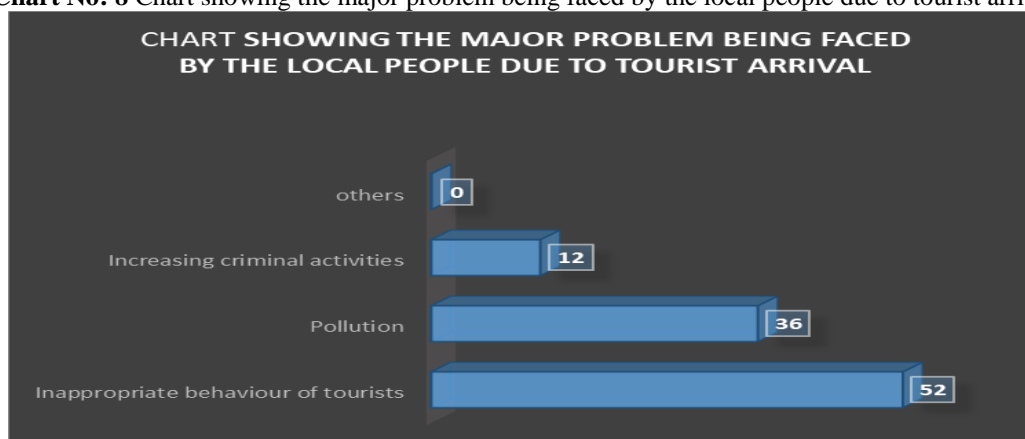
Table No: 8 Table showing the major problem being faced by the local people due to tourist arrival

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percentage
Inappropriate behaviour of tourists	26	52
Pollution	18	36
Increasing criminal activities	6	12
Others	0	0
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: 52% of the respondents opined that inappropriate behaviour of tourists is the main problem faced by them. 36% of respondents are of the opinion that pollution is the major problem. 12% of respondents think that increasing criminal activity is the main problem.

Chart No: 8 Chart showing the major problem being faced by the local people due to tourist arrival



IX. Findings, Suggestions And Conclusion

FINDINGS

Major findings of the study are:

1. 46% of respondents living in Thenmala for more than 10 years
2. The respondents are of the opinion that tourist arrival to Thenmala increases year after year
3. 90% of the respondents are of the opinion that tourism brings development to this place
4. 82% of the respondents are of the opinion that tourism brings employment opportunities to the local people
5. Majority of respondents are of the opinion that tourism improves general infrastructure facility of the area.
6. 78% of the respondents think that tourism improves the standard of living of the local people
7. 60% of the respondents are of the opinion that tourism increases pollution in the area.
8. 48% of respondents think that tourism do not affect the life of the local people adversely
9. 76% of respondents are having the opinion of tourism helps in the conservation of the site
10. Majority of respondents think that eco-tourism helps in cultural exchange
11. 52% of the respondents opined that inappropriate behaviour of tourists is the main problem faced by them

Suggestions

1. Rules have to be enforced to restrict the use of plastic products in the region.
2. Ecotourism policy, regulations and guidelines need to be implemented to ensure that ecotourism does not impact biodiversity, lives and governance systems of communities.
3. Useful and innovative waste management programmes must be implemented by the local bodies.

Conclusion

Tourism is bound to have an impact upon the local community in the area where it is developed, which can be both negative and positive. The study entitled "Thenmala Eco-Tourism: A Study on Impact and Influence on The Local People" is an attempt to find out the impact of eco tourism on tourist site and the people living in that locality. The study revealed that tourism creates employment opportunities to the local people, helps in developing general infrastructure facilities and thereby increasing standard of living of the local people. At the other side inappropriate behaviour of tourists, pollution etc. are the major problems affecting the inhabitants of Thenmala. The study suggests that ecotourism policy, should be implemented to ensure that ecotourism does not impact biodiversity, lives and governance systems of communities.

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