



Tourist Satisfaction in Kerala Agritourism: Insights from Domestic and International Visitors

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Tourism has been an essential component of human civilization since the beginning, evolving through various forms, phases, and practices over the centuries. Agritourism is a type of tourism that uses agricultural life as a tourist attraction. It is either agricultural tourism or agricultural marketing. It has the potential to generate additional income and employment for farmers. Agriculture has been a cornerstone of life in Kerala since ancient times, and even in today's digital era, traditional farming methods remain prevalent among the farming community. It can help to boost local economic development and also helps to preserve biodiversity. Furthermore, rural communities must recognize the value of agricultural biodiversity and the need to protect it. It is important to measure the quality of services offered at the agritourism centre to ensure the

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operational effectiveness of centres as well as the tourist satisfaction [1]. The study was conducted to assess the level of satisfaction of foreign and domestic tourists in the agritourism destinations.

Methodology: Primary survey was conducted among 150 domestic tourists and 150 foreign tourists who visited agritourism centres in Kerala using pre-tested structured questionnaire.

Results: The findings indicated low satisfaction with accessibility, disability-friendly environment, telecommunication facilities and medical facilities available at the agritourism center. The low satisfaction level indicates that these elements are not functioning efficiently in agritourism destinations. As mentioned in the earlier discussions, accessibility is vital for the success of agritourism destinations. Most of the tourists were hesitant to revisit the centers because of inadequate accessibility. More than just a practical concern, it is crucial for boosting economic development, enhancing visitor satisfaction, and promoting sustainable agritourism practices. Likewise network connectivity challenges in agritourism centers located in hill areas pose significant obstacles to effective operation and visitor satisfaction. These issues affect communication, emergency response, and financial viability of centres as well as tourists. Medical facilities are essential to agritourism destinations, crucial for safeguarding the well-being of visitors. The agritourism centers are located in remote areas, making it challenging to access hospitals in emergency situations. So having adequate medical services in tourism centers are essential for protecting the health and well-being of tourists.

Conclusion: The study assessed the level of satisfaction of foreign and domestic tourists in the agritourism destinations. Visitor satisfaction is critical to the success of agritourism destinations, as it influences visitor loyalty, the destination's reputation, operational improvements, and financial gains. By focusing on providing superior experiences and actively seeking feedback, agritourism operators can enhance their offerings, establish a positive reputation, and foster long-term growth.

Keywords: Domestic tourists; foreign tourists; agritourism; satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is transforming and expanding rapidly. Tourism is recognized as an important factor in global trade and the world economy [2]. Tourism has transformed from an expensive concept to a universal way of life. Environmental concerns and ideas for alternative tourism are the primary driving forces behind current global tourism. Tourism has transformed over time according to visitor's needs [3]. It generates jobs and connects communities to the rest of the world. It can also foster sustainable growth in local communities, traditional industries, and connections to other areas of development [4]. Global tourism shows a rapid recovery of tourist arrivals to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.

Tourism contributes significantly to the country's foreign exchange earnings. In 2022, foreign exchange earnings (FEE) from tourism were US\$ 16,926 million, a 92.41 percent increase over the US\$ 8,797 million FEE in 2021. Over 6.19 million and 1.52 million foreign tourists visited the country in 2022 and 2021, respectively, up from 10.93 million in 2019. Even though the numbers were lower than pre-pandemic levels, foreign and domestic tourist visits to India increased significantly in 2022, benefiting the country's economy. India received 1731.01 million

domestic tourist visits in 2022, up 155.45 percent from 677.63 million in 2021 [5].

Tourism has contributed significantly to Kerala's economy for decades, generating Rs. 35,168.42 crore in revenue in 2022. Total earnings in 2022, including direct and indirect means, were Rs 35,168.42 crore, representing a remarkable increase of 186.25 percent over 2021. Foreign exchange earnings and domestic tourist earnings from tourism in 2022 have also significantly improved. In 2022, they were Rs 2,792.42 crore and Rs 24,588.96 crore, respectively. In 2021, foreign exchange earnings were Rs 461.5 crore, while domestic tourist earnings were Rs 9,103.93 crore [6].

Agritourism is a type of tourism that uses agricultural life as a tourist attraction. It is either agricultural tourism or agricultural marketing. It has the potential to generate additional income and employment for farmers. Agriculture and tourism can help to boost local economic development. It also helps to preserve biodiversity. Furthermore, rural communities must recognize the value of agricultural biodiversity and the need to protect it.

To merge agriculture with tourism, the Kerala Agri-Tourism Network project was inaugurated

by Kerala's Tourism Minister, Sri. Muhammed Riyaz, in September 2021, as a sub sector of the Responsible Tourism Mission. This initiative aims to identify and develop 500 new tourism hubs in rural areas over the next five years, in collaboration with the Local Government Department. As part of this initiative, the tourism department launched a website 4 named "Kerala Agri-Tourism Network" to promote the agri-tourism centers of Kerala. This will be beneficial for host agripreneurs, allowing them to register their units on the agri-tourism network, attract more tourists, and achieve greater success.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection: This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from the selected sample respondents using pre tested structured questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from the published reports of Government organizations such as Ministry of Tourism India, Department of Tourism Kerala, KTDC (Kerala Tourism Development Corporation), DTPC (District Tourism Promotion Council) etc.

Sample size and selection: The tourists who visited at least one agritourism destination during 2022-23 were selected for the study. For the collection of primary data, 150 domestic tourists, 150 foreign tourists were selected randomly from the agritourism destinations in Kerala. So, the total sample size of the study is 300.

Tools for data analysis: The collected data were analysed by using Index method, Mann-Whitney U test

a) Index method: For analysing tourists' satisfaction, the study adopted 5-point scale for recording the response [7]. The formula for calculating index is as follows

$$\text{Index} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^k S_{ij} \times 100}{\sum \text{max} S_j}$$

Whereas;

i = respondent

j = factor

S_{ij} = total score of the j^{th} factor of the i^{th} respondent.

$\text{max} S_j$ = maximum score of j^{th} factor

Scales and weightage used to measure tourists satisfaction are as follows:

Response	Weightage
Highly satisfied (HS)	5
Satisfied (S)	4
Resigned (R)	3
Dissatisfied (D)	2
Highly Dissatisfied (HD)	1

b) Mann-Whitney U test: It is a non-parametric statistical method used to compare the distributions of two independent groups. Mann – Whitney U test has the following underlying hypothesis

H0: Two populations are equal

H1: Two populations are not equal

Mann – Whitney U test is calculated as follows:

$$U = n_1 n_2 + \{\eta_2(\eta_2 + 1)\}/2 - \sum_{i=\eta_1+1}^{\eta_2} R_i$$

Whereas;

U= Mann Whitney U test statistics

n_1 = Sample size one

n_2 = Sample size two

R_i = Sum of ranks assigned to the value of the sample

The test is used to identify the difference in satisfaction of domestic and foreign tourists at agritourism destinations. The hypothesis is given below;

2.1 Satisfaction Hypothesis

H0: No significant difference in the satisfaction of domestic and foreign tourists at agritourism destinations.

H1: Significant difference in the satisfaction of domestic and foreign tourists at agritourism destinations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the tourist satisfaction was assessed by using variables such as hospitality [8], safety [9], amenities, accessibility [10], tour package offers, travelling and accommodation cost and guide service [11]. The collected data from the domestic tourists and foreign tourists were analysed by using tools like index method [12] and Mann Whitney U test. The Table 1 outlines the range of indices used to evaluate the satisfaction statements and the levels of satisfaction reported by domestic and international tourists.

Table 1. Domestic and foreign tourists' satisfaction

Sl. No	Particulars	Domestic tourists		Foreign tourists	
		Score	Index	Score	Index
1.	Staff /guide behaviour	598	80 (S)	622	83 (S)
2.	Safety and security	586	78 (R)	603	80 (R)
3.	Quality of food	605	81 (S)	623	83 (S)
4.	Hygiene	540	72 (R)	560	75 (R)
5.	Accessibility	402	54 (D)	447	60 (D)
6.	Problem resolution system	514	69 (R)	531	71 (R)
7.	Feedback and reporting mechanism	500	67 (R)	513	68 (R)
8.	Registration/ booking procedure	559	75 (R)	570	76 (R)
9.	Event and recreational activities	620	83 (S)	629	84 (S)
10.	Hospitality	554	74 (R)	596	79 (R)
11.	Environment friendliness	545	73 (R)	560	75 (R)
12.	Availability of shopping facilities	587	78 (R)	606	81 (R)
13.	Disable friendly environment	460	61 (D)	490	65 (D)
14.	Cost of entertainment activities	514	69 (R)	524	70 (R)
15.	Medical facilities	465	62 (D)	512	68 (R)
16.	Telecommunication facilities	461	61 (D)	477	64 (D)
Total		8510	71 (R)	8863	74 (R)

Table 1 represent the tourist satisfaction in the agritourism destinations. Tourists were satisfied with the agritourism services such as staff/ guide behaviour, quality of food and event and recreational activities. It means that expectations regarding these elements were met by them. Both the tourists were dissatisfied with the accessibility element, disable friendly environment and telecommunication facilities at agritourism centre. The absence of these elements prevents the tourists/ disabled tourists, from easily reaching, communicating and enjoying the facilities of agritourism destination. Domestic tourists were also dissatisfied with medical facilities at agritourism centre. Most of the centers are situated in remote areas with limited access to hospitals. They claimed that agritourism centre is not proving any adequate medical facilities to the tourists. The tourists marked neutral rating to safety and security, hygiene, problem resolution system, feedback and reporting mechanism, registration/ booking procedure, hospitality, environment friendliness [13], cost of entertainment activities, shopping amenities and telecommunication facilities. The overall satisfaction index score is higher for foreign tourists (74) compare to domestic tourists (71). The overall tourist satisfaction at the agritourism centre were rated as resigned by the tourists despite not being fully satisfied about the services of agritourism centre. It stated that the overall impression or evaluation falls somewhere between highly satisfied and dissatisfied, indicating a neutral or middling assessment.

The significant difference in the satisfaction level of domestic and foreign tourist is measured by using Mann Whitney u test. Out of 16

statements, the statement of medical facilities showed p value < 0.05. So, reject the Ho. Means the satisfaction level of both domestic and foreign tourists were not similar regarding medical facilities. All other statements showed no significant difference in the tourists' satisfaction level.

4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The findings indicated low satisfaction with accessibility, disability-friendly environment, telecommunication facilities and medical facilities available at the agritourism center. The low satisfaction level indicates that these elements are not functioning efficiently in agritourism destinations. As mentioned in the earlier discussions, accessibility is vital for the success of agritourism destinations. Most of the tourists were hesitant to revisit the centers because of inadequate accessibility. More than just a practical concern, it is crucial for boosting economic development, enhancing visitor satisfaction, and promoting sustainable agritourism practices. Likewise network connectivity challenges in agritourism centers located in hill areas pose significant obstacles to effective operation and visitor satisfaction. These issues affect communication, emergency response, and financial viability of centres as well as tourists. Medical facilities are essential to agritourism destinations, crucial for safeguarding the well-being of visitors. The agritourism centers are located in remote areas, making it challenging to access hospitals in emergency situations. So having adequate medical services in tourism centers are essential for protecting the health and well-being of tourists.

Visitor satisfaction is critical to the success of agritourism destinations, as it influences visitor loyalty, the destination's reputation, operational improvements, and financial gains [14]. By focusing on providing superior experiences and actively seeking feedback, agritourism operators can enhance their offerings, establish a positive reputation, and foster long-term growth.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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