



HOW KERALA'S LOCAL POPULACE PERCEIVES THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF TOURISM

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Abstract

Kerala has established itself as a notable destination in international tourism. The influx of both domestic and foreign visitors benefits the state through foreign exchange earnings and job creation. Local residents, as key stakeholders in tourism, observe the arrival of tourists and the activities around them. This shapes their understanding of what tourism means. Since tourists interact with the local community, it is important to assess how supportive and cooperative the residents are in welcoming visitors. Without the genuine and willing support of locals, the tourism industry cannot thrive. This study reveals that tourism influences the social life, culture, and traditions of people living near tourist spots. Residents believe tourism offers social benefits such as cultural exchange, recognition, and preservation of traditional arts. Their community does not experience issues like increased substance abuse, harmful social behaviors, or a decline in family values due to tourism. The study clearly shows that social perceptions regarding tourism are largely positive.

Keywords: Kerala tourism, Social convention, Socio-cultural impacts of tourism, Host community attitudes, Community participation.

INTRODUCTION

Kerala, often referred to as “God’s Own Country”, continues to be one of India’s most prominent tourism destinations, attracting both domestic and international visitors in the post-pandemic period from 2022 onwards. Tourism remains a key sector for the state economy by contributing to foreign exchange earnings, income generation, and employment opportunities, especially in regions facing issues of unemployment and underemployment. At the same time, rising tourist flows to destinations across Kerala have intensified the daily interaction between visitors and local residents, making the socio-cultural effects of tourism on host communities an important area of contemporary study.

Residents living in and around tourist destinations are important stakeholders of the tourism industry because they constantly observe tourist activities and changes occurring in their surroundings. Their day-to-day experiences shape how they define and perceive “tourism” as a social phenomenon rather than just an economic activity. Tourism involves continuous contact between people from different regions and cultures, leading to the exchange of ideas, lifestyles, and value systems, which can gradually transform local customs, social behaviour, and cultural expressions. In the present scenario, with increased connectivity, social media influence, and new forms of tourism such as experiential, responsible, and heritage tourism, these socio-cultural interactions have become even more visible and complex.

As tourists mingle more closely with the local community through homestays, community-based tourism projects, cultural festivals, and local guide services, the attitudes of natives towards tourists become crucial for the long-term sustainability of tourism. Positive perceptions and wholehearted support from local residents can encourage hospitality, preserve cultural attractions, and create a welcoming environment, whereas negative perceptions may lead to resistance and social tension. Therefore, understanding whether the local people feel that tourism strengthens cultural pride, promotes folk arts, improves social recognition, or, on the contrary, leads to social problems and value erosion is highly relevant in the current context.

In the post-2022 period, Kerala has been actively promoting sustainable and responsible tourism models that emphasise community participation, cultural preservation, and minimisation of adverse socio-cultural impacts. This policy direction makes the study of local community perceptions even more significant, as the success of such initiatives depends on how residents evaluate tourism’s influence on their social life and cultural identity. Hence, examining the present-day social perceptions of tourism among natives in Kerala provides valuable insights for planners, policymakers, and researchers to balance economic growth with socio-cultural well-being and to ensure that tourism development remains both people-centred and sustainable.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To analyse the key factors that shape the social conventions of tourism among the local residents in Kerala.
2. To determine whether these social conventions of the natives are favourable for the development of tourism in Kerala.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is entirely based on primary data and uses a multi-stage sampling technique focusing on major tourist destinations in North Kerala, identified using the latest Kerala Tourism Statistics 2024. A set of prominent sites that attract both domestic and foreign tourists in the northern districts (such as Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasaragod) were selected, including Kappad Beach, Muzhappilangad Beach, Bekal Fort and the Nilesishwar backwaters. In the first stage, these destinations were chosen as sampling locations; in the second stage, the specific wards in which each destination is located were identified, and structured questionnaires were randomly distributed to households residing in these wards. This study employs primary data collected through structured questionnaires administered to respondents aged 18 years and above residing in wards adjacent to major tourist attractions in Kerala. Given Kerala's large population, the sample size of 415 was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations. A multi-stage sampling technique was applied to ensure representativeness across selected tourist destinations.

Mean scores of native perceptions towards tourism were computed and compared against a neutral assumed mean of 3 on a 5-point Likert scale. The significance of differences between observed means and the assumed mean was tested using t-tests. Additionally, ANOVA and Scheffe tests were employed to analyse variations across demographic groups and tourist site characteristics.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

1. H₁: There is a significant difference in the natives' social perceptions of tourism based on their demographic profile.

SOCIAL CONVENTION OF TOURISM AMONG THE LOCAL RESIDENTS

Table 1 presents the social views of tourism among local residents.

TABLE 2

SOCIAL CONVENTION OF TOURISM AMONG LOCAL RESIDENTS.

Statement	Mean	SD	Assumed Mean	t-value	p-value
Tourist need to be treated with courtesy	3.98	1.05	3	17.16*	0
Tourism helps cultural exchange	3.04	0.84	3	2.08*	0.041
Tourism being recognition to the locality	3.75	0.94	3	15.95*	0
Tourism helps sustenance of folk dance	4.13	0.85	3	28.01*	0
Tourism create problem of drugs and liquor	2.55	1.14	3	-7.71*	0

Tourism creates unhealthy social practices	2.76	0.87	3	-5.22*	
Tourism impaires family values	2.7	0.88	3	-6.66*	0
Tourism spoils the privacy of natives	2.25	0.95	3	-9.21*	0
Overall social views	25.16	3.54	24	8.59*	0

Source : Primary Data

The table makes it evident that the mean score of the statement, ‘tourists need to be treated with courtesy’ (Mean=3.98, SD=1.05, $t=17.16$, $p=0.000$), ‘tourism helps cultural exchange’ (Mean=3.04, SD=0.84, $t=2.08$, $p=0.041$), ‘tourism being recognition to the locality’ (Mean=3.75, SD=0.94, $t=15.95$, $p=0.000$), ‘tourism helps sustenance of folk dance’ (Mean=4.13, SD=0.85, $t=28.01$, $p=0.000$) are above the assumed mean (3). So the natives agree with these statements and the perception is significantly high, since p-values are less than 0.05. In the case of statements, ‘tourism spoils the privacy of natives’ (Mean=2.25, SD=0.95, $t=-9.21$, $p=0.000$), ‘tourism create problem of drugs and liquor’ (Mean=2.55, SD=1.14, $t=-7.71$, $p=0.000$), ‘tourism creates unhealthy social practices’ (Mean=2.76, SD=0.87, $t=-5.22$, $p<0.05$), ‘tourism impairs family values’ (Mean=2.70, SD=0.88, $t=-6.66$, $p=0.000$), the mean values are significantly less than the assumed mean (3) since the p-values are less than 0.05 and the natives disagree with these statements. Natives opine that tourists need to be treated with courtesy, helps cultural exchange, brings recognition to locality and helps sustenance of folk dance. At the same time natives opine that tourism does not cause liquor and drugs problem, unhealthy social practice and deterioration of family values or spoil privacy of natives. Overall social views (Mean=25.16, SD=3.54, $t=8.59$, $p=0.000$) are significantly above the assumed mean of 24. Overall, the analysis shows that the natives have a significantly positive social conventions of tourism. They clearly agree that tourists should be treated with courtesy, that tourism promotes cultural exchange, brings recognition to the locality, and supports the sustenance of folk arts, as all these statements have mean scores above the assumed neutral value of 3 with p-values less than 0.05. At the same time, they significantly disagree that tourism spoils the privacy of natives, causes liquor and drug problems, creates unhealthy social practices, or impairs family values, since the mean scores for these negative statements are significantly below 3 with p-values less than 0.05. Thus, tourism is viewed as socially beneficial rather than harmful in the study area.

DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISON OF SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF TOURISM

In this context, the natives’ social perceptions of tourism are analysed with respect to age, gender, marital status, education, occupation and income. One-way analysis of variance, Scheffe test and independent samples t-test are employed for the purpose of analysis.

H₁: Natives’ social perceptions of tourism differ significantly for at least one of the demographic groups such as age, gender, marital status, education, occupation or income.

Table 2 presents the social conventions of tourism among natives across different age categories.

TABLE 2**AGE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NATIVES' SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF TOURISM**

Age Group	Number	Mean	SD	p-value
Upto 30 years	52	24.43	4.05	14.90 (p=0.000)
30-40 years	129	27.03	2.79	
40-50 years	128	25.96	3.34	
50-60 years	80	23.83	3.43	
Above 60 years	26	23.86	3.12	
Total	415	25.51	3.53	

Source:Primary Data

The table 2 shows that the mean score of the age group 30-40 years is 27.03. This is followed by 40- 50 years (25.96), upto 30 years (24.43), above 60 years (23.86) and 50 -60 years (23.83). Analysis of variance reveals that there exists significant difference in the natives' social conventions of tourism among various age groups since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Hence the hypothesis 'There is no significant difference in the natives' social perceptions of tourism based on age' is rejected.

Scheffe's test was applied to identify significant differences in social conventions of tourism across age groups, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3**MULTIPLE COMPARISONS OF SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF TOURISM SCORES BY AGE GROUPS**

(I)Age	(J)Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	p-value	95%Confident level	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
upto 30	30-40	-2.59	0.549	0	-4.284	-0.894
	40-50	-1.52	0.544	0.104	-3.198	-0.168
	50-60	0.7	0.589	0.901	-1.217	2.432
	Above 60	0.58	0.773	0.963	-1.798	2.99
30-40	40-50	1.07	0.426	0.176	-0.245	2.396
	50-60	3.18	0.484	0	1.7	4.692
	Above 60	3.19	0.698	0	1.03	5.33
40-50	50-60	2.12	0.478	0.001	0.637	3.604
	Above 60	2.11	0.693	0.056	-0.036	4.258
50-60	Above 60	-0.01	0.728	1	-2.268	2.246

Source:Primary Data

* Significant at 0.05 level

These multiple comparison results show that social perceptions of tourism differ mainly for the 30–40 age group when compared to several other age groups. The mean scores of the 30–40 group are significantly higher than those of the “up to 30” group (Mean difference = 2.59, $p < 0.05$), the 50–60 group (Mean difference = 3.18, $p < 0.05$), and the “above 60” group (Mean difference = 3.19, $p < 0.05$), since their confidence intervals do not include zero. In contrast, differences between many other age pairs (for example, up to 30 vs 50–60, up to 30 vs above 60, 40–50 vs above 60, and 50–60 vs above 60) are not statistically significant, as their p -values are greater than 0.05 and the confidence intervals include zero.

Overall, this indicates that people aged 30–40 years have a distinctly different (and likely more positive or higher) social perception score towards tourism compared with several other age groups, whereas most of the remaining age groups do not differ significantly from each other in their social perception of tourism.

Table 4 presents the social perceptions of tourism among natives by gender.

TABLE 4
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM

Gender	Number	Mean	SD	t-value (p-value)
Female	180	25.72	3.95	0.934
Male	235	25.38	4.35	($p=0.350$)
Total	415	25.51	25.52	

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 indicates that female respondents ($n=180$) have a slightly higher mean social perception score of tourism ($M=25.72$, $SD=3.95$) compared to male respondents ($n=235$, $M=25.38$, $SD=4.35$), with an overall sample mean of 25.51 ($SD=25.52$). The independent samples t -test reveals no statistically significant difference between genders ($t=0.934$, $p=0.350 > 0.05$). Thus, social perceptions of tourism remain consistent across male and female natives, supporting the acceptance of the null hypothesis that gender does not influence these conventions.

Table 5 presents the social conventions of tourism among natives by marital status.

TABLE 5
SOCIAL CONVENTIONS BASED ON MARITAL STATUS

Marital status	Number	Mean	SD	t-value (p-value)
Married	348	25.69	3.36	2.42
Unmarried	67	24.44	4.35	($p=0.016$)
Total	415	25.52	3.54	

Source: Primary data

* Significant at 0.05 level

Table 5 shows that married respondents (n=348) have a higher mean social perception score towards tourism (M=25.69, SD=3.36) compared to unmarried respondents (n=67, M=24.44, SD=4.35), with an overall mean of 25.52 (SD=3.54). The independent samples t-test indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t=2.42$, $p=0.016 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that marital status influences natives' social perceptions of tourism, with married individuals holding more favorable views.

Table 6 presents the social conventions of tourism among natives by educational qualification.

TABLE 6
SOCIAL CONVENTIONS BASED ON EDUCATION

Education	Number	Mean	SD	F-value (p-value)
Matriculation	148	25.50	3.20	11.27 (p=0.000)
Higher secondary	98	26.94	2.95	
Graduate	169	24.78	3.88	
Total	415	25.52	3.54	

Source: Primary data

The table indicates that natives' social perceptions of tourism differ significantly according to their educational qualification. Respondents with higher secondary education report the most favorable social perception (Mean=26.94, SD=2.95), followed by those with matriculation (Mean=25.50, SD=3.20), while graduates show the lowest mean score (Mean=24.78, SD=3.88). The one-way ANOVA result is statistically significant ($F=11.27$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$), indicating that at least one educational group differs from the others in social perception of tourism, and the null hypothesis of no difference across education levels is rejected.

TABLE 7

MULTIPLE COMPARISONS OF SOCIAL CONVENTION SCORES BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

(I) Education	(J) Education (I-J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Errors	p-value	95%confident interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Matriculation	Higher secondary	-1.44	0.464	0.007	-2.584	-0.302
	Graduate	0.71	0.392	0.185	-0.241	1.68
Higher secondary	Graduate	2.16	0.455	0	1.043	3.282

Source: Primary data

The Scheffe multiple comparison results show that educational qualification significantly affects social conventions of tourism. Respondents with higher secondary education have a significantly higher mean score than those with matriculation (Mean difference = -1.44, $p = 0.007$; 95% CI: -2.584 to -0.302), indicating more favourable conventions among the higher secondary group. The difference between matriculation and graduate respondents is not significant (Mean difference = 0.71, $p = 0.185$; 95% CI: -0.241 to 1.68), as the confidence interval includes zero. However, higher secondary respondents differ significantly from graduates (Mean difference = 2.16, $p = 0.000$; 95% CI: 1.043 to 3.282), showing that those with higher secondary education hold the most positive social conventions of tourism compared to graduates.

The social conventions of tourism among natives according to their occupation are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF TOURISM BY OCCUPATION

Occupation	Number	Mean	SD	F-value p-value
Business	129	27.53	2.66	28.27
salaried	92	23.61	3.08	
agricultural	55	24.58	3.61	
manual labour workers	139	25.23	3.59	
Total	415	25.51	3.54	

Source: Primary data

Table 8 shows significant differences in natives' social conventions of tourism across occupation groups. Manual labour workers report the highest mean score (27.53), followed by agricultural workers (25.23), salaried employees (24.58), and business owners (23.61), against the overall sample mean of 25.51. The one-way ANOVA yields a highly significant result ($F=28.27$, $p<0.001$), rejecting the null hypothesis of equal conventions across occupations. Manual labour workers exhibit the most positive social conventions of tourism, potentially due to direct economic benefits from tourism activities in Kerala. Business owners show the least favorable views, possibly reflecting concerns over competition or cultural impacts. Post-hoc tests like Scheffe are recommended to identify specific pairwise differences among these occupation groups.

Table 9 displays Scheffe multiple comparison results for social conventions of tourism among different occupational categories.

TABLE 9
MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF TOURISM ACROSS OCCUPATIONS.

(I) Occupation	(J)Occupation	Mean Difference (I_J)	Std Error	p-value	95%Confident t level	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Business	Salaried	3.95*	0.451	0	2.664	5.196
	Agriculture	2.97*	0.534	0	1.466	4.168
	Manual Workers	2.28*	0.396	0	1.173	3.406
Salaried	Agriculture	-0.98*	0.569	0.414	-2.561	0.634
	Manual Workers	-1.64*	0.442	0.014	-2.884	-0.399
Agriculture	Manual Workers	-0.68*	0.527	0.649	-2.159	0.803

Source: Primary data

Business respondents differ significantly from all other groups, showing lower conventions (vs. Salaried: mean diff=3.95, $p=0.000$; vs. Agricultural: 2.97, $p=0.000$; vs. Manual Workers: 2.28, $p=0.000$). Salaried respondents differ significantly from Manual Workers (mean diff=-1.64, $p=0.014$), with Manual Workers holding more positive views. All differences marked with * indicate statistical significance at $p<0.05$, with 95% confidence intervals excluding zero for these pairs. No significant difference exists between Salaried and Agricultural groups (mean diff=-0.98, $p=0.414$) or between Agricultural and Manual Workers (mean diff=-0.68, $p=0.649$), as p -values exceed 0.05 and confidence intervals include zero.

Table 10 displays natives' social conventions of tourism according to income groups.

TABLE 10
INCOME-BASED SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF TOURISM.

Income (Rs)	Number	Mean	SD	P-value
Upto 100000	270	25.94	3.69	8.18 ($p=0.000$)
100000-200000	99	25.22	2.65	
200000-500000	26	24	3.1	
Above 500000	20	22.12	2.47	
Total	415	25.51	3.54	

Source: Primary data

Table 10 reveals significant differences in natives' social conventions of tourism across income groups. Those earning up to ₹100,000 show the most positive views (Mean=25.94, SD=3.69), while highest earners above ₹500,000 have the least favorable conventions (Mean=22.12, SD=2.47), against the overall mean of 25.51 (SD=3.54). The one-way ANOVA confirms statistical significance ($F=8.18$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$), rejecting the null hypothesis of no income-based differences. Lower-income groups (up to ₹200,000) exhibit stronger positive social conventions, likely due to economic benefits from tourism in Kerala. Higher-income respondents show reduced positivity, possibly from concerns over cultural disruption or overcrowding. Scheffe tests would clarify specific pairwise differences.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Age Groups: 30-44 year-olds display the highest positivity, differing significantly from others via Scheffe tests.
- Gender: Uniform perceptions across males and females ($p=0.350$), no significant variation.
- Marital Status: Married natives more favorable than unmarried ($p=0.016$).
- Education: Higher secondary group leads (Mean=26.94), graduates trail (Mean=24.78; $F=11.27$, $p=0.000$).
- Occupation: Manual workers highest (Mean=27.53), business lowest (Mean=23.61; $F=28.27$, $p<0.001$); Scheffe shows business differs from all.
- Income: Low earners ($\leq ₹100,000$) most positive (Mean=25.94), high earners ($> ₹500,000$) least (Mean=22.12; $F=8.18$, $p=0.000$).

CONSUMMATION

The analysis reveals a clear socioeconomic divide in natives' social conventions of tourism, with lower-status groups, manual workers (mean=27.53), low-income earners up to ₹100,000 (mean=25.94), higher secondary educated respondents (mean=26.94), and married individuals, consistently exhibiting stronger positive views due to direct economic benefits like employment and local trade opportunities in Kerala. In contrast, higher-status segments such as business owners (mean=23.61), graduates (mean=24.78), and high earners above ₹500,000 (mean=22.12) show greater caution, likely stemming from concerns over competition, cultural disruption, congestion, and resource strains. ANOVA results reject equality hypotheses across age, marital status, education, occupation, and income (all $p<0.05$ except gender, $p=0.350$), confirmed by Scheffe tests highlighting specific pairwise differences (e.g., business vs. all occupations), underscoring the need for nuanced tourism policies that balance benefit-sharing for vulnerable groups with mitigation strategies for influential skeptics. The study reveals that tourism has some impact on the social life, culture and customs of the natives living in and around the destination. Hence natives residing in and around the tourist destination would perceive the term tourism from social perspectives. The natives tend to support the tourism industry only when they perceive a positive experience about the existence of tourism. Natives are of the view that

tourism brings some social advantages in the form of cultural exchange, recognition and sustenance of folk arts. Their area does not bear the brunt of liquor and drugs problem, unhealthy social practices and erosion in family values because of tourism. The study unequivocally makes it evident that social conventions of tourism among the natives in Kerala are conducive for the smokeless industry.

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