
ASSESSING THE RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - AN EMPIRICAL INQUIRY OF YELAGIRI, TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Tourism in India is experiencing exponential growth with a massive contribution of 9.6% to the GDP and 9.3% to the total employment. Nevertheless, sustainability is emerging out to be one of the most predominant factors to be considered while developing and promoting Indian destinations. Ever since the formulation of its definition in the Brundtland Commission report, entitled Our Common Future, "Sustainable Development" has been invariably the most discussed concept in the development literature. To ensure sustainability, each stakeholder must be conscious about their actions and impacts on the destination. In that regard, Responsible tourism is a useful tool to identify key local issues and address them to attain sustainable development by providing clear report of the progress.

The current study is an empirical analysis which tries to assess the extent to which responsible tourism practices are followed by different stakeholders at Yelagiri and consequently, highlight the sustainability of the destination. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected through questionnaires (i.e. structured and unstructured), field notes and participant observation. Thematic content analysis has been employed to analyze qualitative data while quantitative data has been analyzed through SPSS software and Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data collected from the local community members and Govt. officials have been triangulated with the quantitative data collected

from the tourists to further reinforce the findings. The findings of the study reveal positive economic benefits to the host community albeit negative social and environmental impacts on the destination; thus, pointing towards unsustainable development.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development, Responsible Tourism Practices, Host Community Benefit, Economic Development, Environment Protection*

Introduction

Tourism in India is considered as one of the sunrise industries contributing 9.6% to the total GDP and 9.3% to the total employment (WTTC, 2017). Indian Tourism industry registered a growth of 10.7% and 15.1% in the foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) and foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) respectively during January-December, 2016 over January-December, 2015 (Ministry of Tourism, GoI, 2017). However, as India continues to gear up its tourism endeavours, Sustainability of its destinations has been one of its key focuses which can be easily marked in the 12th Five Year Plan (Ministry of Tourism, GoI, n.d.).

The first notable mention of Sustainable Development (SD) dates back to the year 1987 in the Brundtland Commission report, entitled *Our Common Future* which was the outcome of United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development (Keeble, 1988). The report defines SD as "... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43). Since then, it has been invariably the most discussed concept in the development literature. However, the concept of SD has its seen share of criticism for being too general, impractical, vague and rhetorical (e.g. Lélé, 1991; Redclift, 2005). Therefore, sustainability is mostly seen as a goal and there are many ways it can be attained. In tourism, the goal of sustainability can be achieved by people taking responsibility of their actions to achieve it (Goodwin, 2016). In that regard, assessing the responsible tourism practices can be a useful tool to identify key local issues and address them to attain sustainable development by providing clear report of the progress (Spenceley, 2012).

Yelagiri Hill is one of the most popular hill stations in Tamil Nadu and with its salubrious climate which is prevalent all-round the year, it is gaining popularity day by day (TTDC, n.d.). Housing a number of attractions ranging from temples to waterfalls, from nature parks to adventure parks and from hiking trails to luxurious resorts, it caters to almost every tourists' needs. With

the increasing popularity and advent of more tourists to the hills, the need for managing the destination in a sustainable fashion and to utilize the resources in a responsible manner has become a daunting task. The current study is an empirical analysis which tries to assess the extent to which responsible tourism practices are followed by different stakeholders at Yelagiri and consequently, highlight the sustainability of the destination.

Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected through questionnaires (i.e. structured and unstructured), field notes and participant observation. Thematic content analysis has been employed to analyse qualitative data while quantitative data has been analysed through SPSS software and Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data collected from the local community members and Govt. officials have been triangulated with the quantitative data collected from the tourists to further reinforce the findings.

Facets of Responsible Tourism

Host Community Benefit

The main aim of any tourism initiative is to improve the participation of host community in tourism and thereby improve their livelihood while selling unique experiences to the tourists to make their visits utmost memorable. This aspect is underpinned in a similar vein as, *“responsible tourism initiatives by comparison often increase the flow of the benefits to local people while also addressing environmental impacts”* (Ashley and Roe, 2002).

Community develops from creative processes (Day, 2006). The creative processes determine whether a community continues or disappears. While social institutions often support an initiative to build a community, it can only come into being through interpretation of reality by community participants. Interpretation of socio-economic elements of their environment occurs only due to the process of social interaction. Community action emerges as a result of interactions among participants mainly in social fields such as education, tourism and recreation, environment and local governance at, which are linked to specific rural areas (Theodori, 2005).

There are a number of economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits accrued to the host community through sustainable tourism, ecotourism or responsible tourism. The positive impacts also include individual benefits to benefits to the entire community (Goodwin, 2009). The benefits can not only be restrained to financial benefits, but also includes a number of non-financial benefits such as enhanced infrastructure, improvement of personal skills, better livelihood and empowerment. The ability to contribute to the planning

process and involve in the decision-making process itself is considered as an integral benefit to the community and its people (Ashley, 2000; DFID, 1999; Scoones, 1998; Simpson, 2008).

Environmental Protection

In majority of the natural and forest areas, the livelihood of the community members depend on the agricultural produces and the forest resources. In fragile areas, human actions result in direct consequences like deterioration in quantity and quality of the various resources in that area. Once these resources are depleted, then the local community will lose their livelihood options which in turn will result in social tension, migration, conflict, etc (Chambers, 1987). Hence, Scherr, (2000) feels that the solution to this is targeted investments and promotion of sustainable practices and policies and management of the resources efficiently. He also quotes on collective investment, resource management, and monitored consumption of resources.

According to Muhanna (2006), community involvement in tourism not only benefits the host community by utilizing the resources, but also helps in managing the resources. Thereby the local community acts as an agency of environment protection in the tourism area. In addition to the preservation, the local community will also be representatives of sustainable practices in the region and assist the local and national governments to implement various tourism policies.

Tourism in a manner plays a significant role in protection and conservation of the environment by pumping in and putting into use the revenue generated from its multi-dimensional forays (Cooper, 2008). The revenue can be from the tourists' visits, entry tickets, accommodation, shopping, taxes, etc. These direct and indirect revenues will in turn be channelized to protect the environment and maintain the serenity of the region, so that in future it will act as the driver to bring in more tourists to the region. As more tourist inflow is recorded, more revenue will be collected and it will act as a multiplier effect (Cooper, 2008; WTO, 1997).

Nature Conservation

All over the world, the variating patterns of the use of land have resulted in the degradation of nature and decline in the natural habitat. As a result of this, many regions which are used for various purposes such as forestry, grazing and agriculture have suffered a setback. Eventually, there arises a

greater need to conserve these resources and nature as a whole before it gets too late (Hobbs et al, 1993; Saunders, 1989; Saunders et al, 1991).

Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) interprets the previous arguments that tourism related with nature has a direct dependency on the various natural resources such as water, scenery, wildlife and vegetation. Nature-based tourism and ecotourism have gained more importance since the late 1980s as it makes a significant contribution to nature conservation (Boo, 1990). Ecotourism is a niche kind of market wherein the education component is given more importance; but then today it is not only the environmentally conscious tourists who visit destinations but mutually varied segments. Therefore, Arnegger, Woltering and Job (2010) felt that the tourism segment based out of nature itself is complex and it needs a component which keeps changing. That is when Goodwin (2011) came up with the concept of responsible tourism which is applicable to a mixture of tourist population who possess varied interests and expectations from the destinations and at the same time the responsibility of nature conservation is there.

Meadows et al (1972) explains how environment acts a backbone for economic growth and how the economic activity in turn acts as a driver for environment protection. He argues that when there is no streamlined or balanced economic growth in a region it will result in environment degradation and also lead to the depletion of the non-renewable resources. These outcomes will have a direct bearing on the quality of human life in the region. Subsequently, researchers (Beattie & Ehrlich, 2004; Chapin et al, 2000; Daily, 1997) asserted that it is very much necessary and important to protect the ecosystem as it provides a range of products and services. It also becomes an ethical issue to protect and conserve the nature according to Rolston (1988) and Nash (1989).

Buckley (2012) explains that one of the modern strategies of conservation is possible through nature-based tourism and it cannot be avoided. The central idea is that nature conservation is a must. Albeit there is no rational definition for nature-based tourism, Goodwin (1996) says that it is very much important to conserve nature as it one of the component of sustainable tourism, most importantly in remote areas.

Community Involvement in Decision Making

There are different views and opinions doing the rounds with respect to community involvement in decision making in tourism. There are mainly

three broad views to be understood from various reviews. Riedel (1972) explained that even in the best conditions most of the community members tend to avoid their participation in the process. In contrary to this, researchers (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bronkhorst et al, 2010; Jamal & Getz, 1995) argued that host community participation in decision making is a voluntary process and by doing so they will be the actual beneficiaries. The third argument by Zhao and Ritchie (2007) is that proper opportunity is not being provided to the community members to take part in the decision-making process. They have also maintained that the only way to provide better avenues for participation is through proper legislation and by an all-inclusive approach in the destination planning and management process. Once legislation is enacted, then it will mandatory to include the community and host members to be part of the tourism decision making process.

Royo et al (2011) argues that though there have been numerous measures and legislation on inclusion of local communities in the decision-making processes, at the local level it has not been implemented much. The financial and administrative powers of the local administration are decentralised and hence the struggle to implement at grassroot level becomes very difficult.

Though many authors and researchers suggest the complete inclusion of local community in the decision-making process, Tosun (1999) and Aref & Redzuan, (2009) opines that there are few parameters for indulging the community in a tourism decision making process. The study was extensively based out for developing countries where tourism plays a major role in the dynamics of the economy. They quote three heads as the limitations such as the Structural Limitations, Operational Limitations and Cultural Limitations.

It is also to be noted that these limitations do not hold the same value or importance in all the destinations as it will vary according to several other parameters in the destinations and practices of the local community. Reinforcing the postulation, researchers (Haywood, 1988; Murphy, 1983; Pigram, 1992) noted that for tourism to sustain itself, the host community and its residents must be willing to participate in the process.

Role of Government

The Agenda 21, which is a policy framework posited by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 was one of the concrete start for the various legislations to be introduced by various countries in the coming years. The

Agenda 21 is an action plan which is completely voluntary in nature and promotes various levels of sustainable development in destinations. The action plan will be executed by the global, national and local governments by performing the duties and responsibilities under their control (Buckley et al, 2003; Harrison et al, 2003; Mowforth & Munt, 2015). Also, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) highlights that the agencies which can effectively implement the Agenda 21 are the local governments as they can set their own standards meeting the requirements of their regions and destinations.

South Africa is one of the leading examples for framing and implementing legislations for active community involvement in tourism and developing responsible tourism. As part of their commitment to implement the Agenda 21, South Africa has introduced a number of legislations and policies which will spruce-up in holistic development. The Municipal Systems Act 2000 (South Africa, 2000) is one among them which entitles the local governments to develop a structured plan called the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) specifically for that local area.

The Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy was formulated in the year 2012, its vision being *“We intend to use tourism to make Myanmar a better place to live in - to provide more employment and greater business opportunities for all our people, to contribute to the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage and to share our rich cultural diversity. We warmly welcome those who appreciate and enjoy our heritage, our way of life and who travel with respect.”* The policy was formulated by consulting a number of public and private stakeholders which came out with a number of action plans and responsibilities (Häusler, 2012).

Tourists' Perception about Responsibility

Stanford (2006) feels that out of all the factors which influence the tourists' perception of being responsible in a destination, environment awareness and responsibility plays a major role as it can be used to generalise the perception on overall responsibility. The tourists as well as the industry players became aware of the need to protect the environment and the resources in the late twentieth century when the environment movement was gaining traction. In addition to this in 1992, the Rio Earth Summit concentrated on the environment through the discussions on sustainable development of tourism (Bohdanowicz, 2006).

According to the study carried out by Jurowski and others (1993), the two demographic characteristics namely the education and age contributes directly to the amount of awareness related to the environment. The tourists who behave responsibly in a tourist destination also tend to show more interest in respecting the local people and their culture and also spend more on the local products thereby bringing greater economic contribution (Fennell, 2008; Weeden, 2008). Miller and others (Miller, Rathouse, Scarles, Holmes & Tribe, 2010) perceive that the understanding of the environmental and social impacts of tourism by tourists is limited and this is also one of the reason for many a negative impact in the destination.

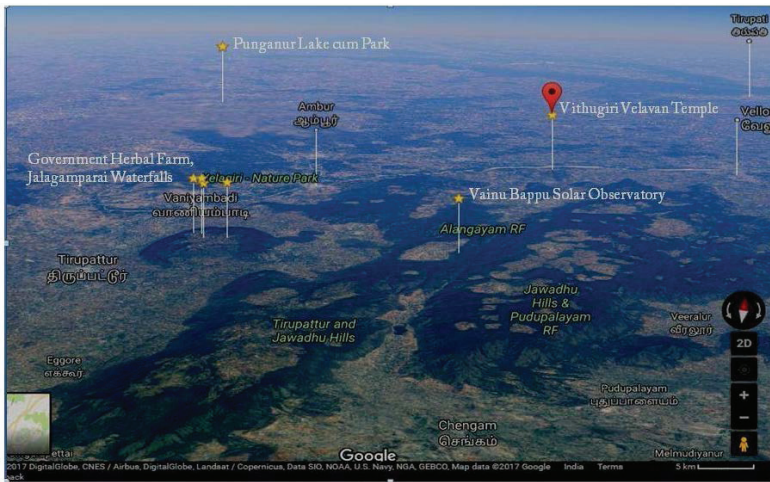
Area and Scope of the Study

The study has been conducted in the Yelagiri Hill region which is one of the popular and exotic hill stations in Tamil Nadu situated at an altitude of 1410 meters. Yelagiri Hill is a favourite mountain destination owing to its pleasant and mild climate which is prevalent round the year. It is located in between four mountains which are home to a number of tribal groups. Inhabitation in these mountains started approximately two hundred years ago. The hills comprise nearly fourteen villages where the inhabitants engage in agriculture, forestry, horticulture, etc for their livelihood. The inhabitants have unique and traditional habits and architectural designs which itself acts as tourism attractions.

The present work attempts to map the issues and challenges that crop up in Yelagiri owing to tourism activities and other unsustainable practices. How far sustainable managements of tourism endeavours can be panacea to the ills faced by the fragile habitats of Yelagiri mountains are discussed in this work which has been conducted in the tourism spots of the mountainous terrains.

Rationale of the Study

With a population of 3,755 (2011 Census) and an area of 29.2 sq. km, the Yelagiri Hill is a perfect hill station for leisure and related activities. Though Yelagiri is not as popular as some of the other South Indian hill stations like Kodaikanal or Ooty, many measures have been taken especially at the district level administration to promote it as a hill tourism destination. Furthermore, due to the shortage of cultivable land in the high-altitude area, tourism acts as one of the main source of income in Yelagiri. Given the exposure to tourism development, it is necessary to check for responsible tourism practices and hence, Yelagiri was chosen as the study area.



Source: - Google Earth/Yelagiri

Fig. 1: Geographical Mapping of the Study Area

In addition to the greenery and natural beauty, there are a number of tourist sites like Punganur Lake cum Park, Velavan Temple, Government Herbal Farm, Jalagamparai Waterfalls, Vainu Bappu Solar Observatory etc. that have made Yelagiri a tourist hub since the last decade. However, the development of Yelagiri as a tourist destination has not been done with proper socio-economic and environmental planning. On their first visit to the destination, the researchers observed that there were little or no responsible practice followed at the destination which served as the trigger to conduct an enquiry. On further investigation, it was observed that unsustainable tourism development is posing some threats to Yelagiri. Hence, a study on sustainable tourism management at Yelagiri is the need of the hour.

Methodology

The study was conducted during the period of March-May, 2017. This research is ‘applied’ in nature as it tries to develop an overall understanding of the current dynamics at the study area (adapted from Patton, 1990: p. 150) and in doing so it aims to contribute its share of knowledge to the existing theory (adapted from Babbie, 2013). Participatory Research approach was applied to collect the data as it allows on the spot, timely and face-to-face collection of data directly from the local community (adapted from Leung, Yen & Minkler, 2004).

Cahn, (2008) argues that in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the destination, the data should be collected from all the shareholders. Accordingly, data collection was done from broadly two groups, i.e. internal group and external group. The internal group consisted of fifteen local community members and five government officials. The external group was composed of eighty tourists. Purposive sampling frame (Tongco, 2007) was employed to select the sample units keeping in mind the characteristics of the population and study objectives.

Data collection was done in two phases carrying out different methods of data collection. In the first phase, unstructured interviews and participant observation were employed to collect data from the internal members and Govt. officials. Following the first phase, collected data was analysed through thematic content analysis and the main themes were noted to be imbibed in the second phase of data collection.

The second phase of data collection was done from tourists to gain insights into the tourists' views. A survey questionnaire was designed keeping in mind the main themes noted during the first phase of data collection. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to add teeth to the study. It can be noted that qualitative and quantitative data serves different purposes and these methods do in fact, complement each other in many instances rather than drifting.

Data collected in the first phase were mostly qualitative in nature, given that unstructured interviews and participant observations were found suitable to set the tone of the study in the primary phase. In the second phase of data collection, a survey questionnaire was designed for tourists and most of the data collected were quantitative in nature. In this research, a mixed method approach was applied to triangulate (adapted from Denzin, 2012) the qualitative data collected in the first phase with the quantitative data collected in the second phase.

Apart from primary data, secondary data was collected from various Govt. dossiers, journals articles, books, web sources and were analysed to provide a theoretical background to the study and also to further validate the findings through triangulation.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1 presents an overview of the facets of responsible tourism followed by the findings and discussions corresponding to those individual components.

Thematic content analysis was applied to analyse the secondary data and the following themes emerged as the most important components of Responsible tourism that needed to be discussed.

Table 1: Summary of Analysed Components of Responsible Tourism

Facets of Responsible Tourism	Description of the Factor	Summary of Findings
Host Community Benefit	Economic, Environmental & Socio-Cultural	Impact Projections - Economic, Socio-Cultural & Environmental
Environmental Protection	Pollution Control, Waste Management	Environmental degradation
Nature Conservation	Sustainable usage of land, water, flora and fauna	Unsustainable usage of Natural Resources
Community Involvement in Decision Making	Inducing Willingness to Participate, Opportunities for Involvement & Bottom-Up Approach	Little Participation in Decision Making
Role of Government	Effective Policy Making, Grassroot Development, Preserving Culture & Heritage and Integrating PPP	Ineffective Policies and Actions
Stakeholders' Perception about Responsibility	Awareness, Sense of Responsibility & Respecting Local Culture	Moderate awareness about Responsibility

Impact Projections - Economic, Socio-Cultural & Environmental

This work embarked on tracking the leads in terms of actual and prospective impacts on the economic, socio-cultural and environmental fronts. The output as regards content analysis is revealed that the economic impacts of tourism in destination Yelagiri has been projected positively while the socio-cultural and environmental dimensions indicates a negative trend. Contextually, responsible tourism can further the economic growth of the destination and well streamlined responsible tourism approaches can also bring a turnaround in the projected negative aspects of socio-cultural and environmental strands of Yelagiri.

While probing whether the host community will be benefited through responsible tourism in the region, it was reported unanimously that there will

be mutual benefit for the host community as well as for the tourists if tourism is managed in a sustainable manner and streamlined. The local tourist officer in the region Mr. R. Munusamy commented that:

“Definitely the community members will be benefited on a large scale as almost all of them are somehow or the other linked with tourism. If it is channelized and properly governed, then it will be advantageous for these people.”

The community members responded saying that they would be very much elated if responsible tourism is promoted as they would be the primary beneficiaries. The tourists in coherence with the stakeholders responded similarly and their responses have been cited in Table 2. An overwhelming number of respondents (equalling to almost 60 percent) who felt that the host community will be benefitted through the adoption of the ideals of Responsible Tourism Framework in the region. The benefits will be mostly in the form of improved livelihood and other economic benefits.

Table 2: Tourists’ Response to Host Community Benefit Through Responsible Tourism

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Completely Agree	16	20	20	20
Agree	32	40	40	60
Somewhat Agree	24	30	30	90
Disagree	4	5	5	95
Completely Disagree	4	5	5	100
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Along with the positive impacts which were mostly economic in nature, there were many negative impacts that were reported due to tourist activities in the region. This had a direct effect or impact on the host community as well. The main negative impact was the environmental change and loss of greenery in the area. Almost all of the stakeholders accepted that the region has changed both in geography and in forest cover with the advent and popularity of tourism and they view this as a serious concern. Mr. M. Sudhakar, Owner of Yelagiri Residency opined:

“It is very obvious that Yelagiri landscape has changed dramatically. If you can compare the pictures of Yelagiri ten years before and now, you can see quite a lot of difference. You will even be amazed on seeing how much it has changed in such a short span.”

There were also some negative socio-cultural impacts traced at the destination such as the demonstration effect (Mcelroy & Albuquerque, 1986) and host community developing a sense of irritation, which can be attributed to the “annoyance” or “antagonism” stage of Doxey’s Irritation Index (Doxey, 1975). There was a mixed response from the interviewees regarding the various negative impacts tourism brings to the destination with the bottom line that community members will be happy to get financial benefits and improved lifestyle out of tourism but not at the cost of spoiling the natural and cultural resources in the region which could be inferred from the under mentioned statement:

“I do not know what to say... It is this tourism which is helping me financially. But seeing my native spoiled by tourists is very much hurting. If the government can regulate this, then it will not be a problem.” – Mrs. Pechiyamma, a Local Vendor in Yelagiri.

Environmental Degradation

An in-depth observation (both individual and participative) revealed that in Yelagiri there is no standard sustainable practice or usage of resources. Stakeholders supported this argument through their responses. The responses were spontaneous and uniform without any distractions. This falls in coherence with the statement given by Mr. K. Vairamuthu, Manger, Yelagiri Marigold Ridge when he was asked if Yelagiri was a Responsible Tourism Destination and resources are utilized in a proper manner. His response is as follows:

“Of course, it is a big no. You yourself can see piles of garbage here and there by the side of the road almost most them are non-degradable plastics. So how can you call this a responsible tourism destination?”

This explains the poor state in which the resources are being handled at the destination. Moreover, the misuse of resources was also resulting in various negative effects like water logging and soil erosion during floods, contamination of drinking water, etc., in the destination.

Every destination has its own saturation limit and once the same is exceeded, it will be extremely difficult or even impossible to rejuvenate (Brown, Turner, Hameed & Bateman, 1997). Having this in mind, a question was posed regarding the sustainability of tourism in Yelagiri with the prevailing conditions and most of the interviewees felt that with the existing conditions in place it will not last long. They also felt that there must be strict and stringent rules in place which will stop further damage to the destination. Mr. A. Saravanan who is a Travel Agent from Yelagiri explained thus:

“Not with the present scenario. There must be strict laws enforced by the government and those who do not follow it must be punished strictly or imposed huge fine amount. Only then people will have some fear and they will not pollute the environment. If that is not happening, then all the greenery will vanish in few years and thereafter no tourist will want to come here.”

Unsustainable Usage of Natural Resources

During the period of stay in the destination for the study, the researchers found out a number of cases and scenarios which were directly related to the unsustainable usage of natural resources. While mapping Yelagiri, it became lucid that the nature conservation mechanism was dismal and lacked the sustainable component completely. There was a wide range of deforestation taking place near the tourist attractions to accommodate more tourist infrastructure and facilities such as the shopping centres and parking areas. It was also evident from the field study that there were lots of illegal encroachment into the forest areas by the locals. The concept of zoning or even planning for further construction is absent or not being followed.

The major causative factor that leads to the largescale decline of natural resources in the region is the various hotels and resorts in the region. They constitute the main resource consumers more or less equal to the local community in the region. Starting from the unaccounted use of water to the illegal constructions, the hotel industry in Yelagiri is a major concern for conserving the natural resources in the region. If the hoteliers in Yelagiri can realise the fact that they are directly indulging in depletion of the natural resources, it would be an introspection for them as they are dependent on it directly.

Little Participation in Decision Making

Community participation in decision making is a key to any successful responsible tourism initiative or project. It was observed that the same was lacking to an alarming extent in Yelagiri as there was not even a single respondent who expressed that they were involved in any of the tourism decision making process. When the stakeholders including the government officials, were asked about their involvement in the tourism decision making process, everyone except for officials from government replied that they were not involved at all. They also expressed wonder on why would they be included in that and this supports the argument that the understanding of wholesome stakeholder participation was clearly lacking. The same was evident from the response by Mr. G. Kumar, Owner, Hotel Golden Nest who stated:

“Why would they hear from us in this regard? Is it not the government’s role? Because no one has ever came and enquired about anything. They just do it on their own. Even if you say something, they will not give a thought to it.”

In contrast to the response to the previous question wherein majority were not aware that they should be included in the decision-making process, once having explained about the concept of inclusion, everyone felt that it is necessary to listen to their views and urge them to raise their opinion.

“First of all, they will not hear from us because we are uneducated. But in case if they consult with us, it will be helpful for them as well as us because we are here for ages and we know the land very well which we will share with them. In return they can tune in to our expectations out of the project.”- Mrs. R. Kanimozhi, local community member.

Ineffective Policies and Actions

From the various literature reviews cited in the review section, it is quite evident that the Government needs to play a pivotal role when it comes to sustainable or responsible tourism. Irrespective of the nature of government (i.e.) Central, State, District or Local, there needs to be a concrete effort to implement various legislations and policies. As it was seen from the reviews earlier, the local government needs to play a fitting role in any development project in a tourist destination. In the same line, the local government in Yelagiri and the officials posted responded that they are more concerned about

implementing the responsible projects. The tourists were asked to respond to the maintenance of Yelagiri as a tourist destination and the results revealed the poor state of Yelagiri. With almost 60 percent of the respondents taking the side of poorly maintained, the current state of Yelagiri is compromised which can be noted from the Table 3 given below. More efforts need to be put in by all the stakeholders, especially the government agencies to properly maintain the destination.

Table 3: Maintenance of Yelagiri as a Tourist Destination

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellently Maintained	4	5.0	5.0	5.0
Somewhat Maintained	28	35.0	35.0	40.0
Poorly Maintained	48	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

There were well spread-out responses when asked about the government's role in maintaining a destination in a responsible fashion. Though the tourists do not blame the government completely for the ill effects of tourism in Yelagiri, they felt that majority of the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the government which is evident from the Table 4.

Table 4: Government's Role is Key in Maintaining the Natural State of a Destination

Options	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Completely Agree	8	10.0	10.0	10.0
Agree	20	25.0	25.0	35.0
Somewhat Agree	28	35.0	35.0	70.0
Disagree	14	17.5	17.5	87.5
Completely Disagree	10	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Moderate Awareness about Responsibility

Though almost all of the local community members were not aware of the definition or theoretical aspects of responsible tourism, they were very

much aware of the attributes of it and some were even following it for ages by virtue of their habits. The concept might be a novel one, but the responsible practices dates back to centuries in this region. In support to this argument Mrs. Kalaiarasi, a local vendor in Yelagiri stated:

“By Responsible Tourism do you mean tourism which is carried out by responsible means and practices. If you mean that, then we have been practicing it for quite a long time now. It is just without knowledge we follow it because it is part of our culture and tradition to respect and protect nature.”

Though the local community members were holding a lot of responsibility for their own land, they felt that the same was being polluted by the tourists visiting the destination. The unanimous reply from the local community members upon asked about how responsible the tourists are acting, was that “they were not responsible at all”. Also, they accused the tourists of spoiling the destination with their irresponsible acts.

“There can be no doubt in that. They do not care because they do not live here. But we live over here and this is our land. But we cannot blame all of them. There are a handful of tourists who are responsible, but the majority just spoil everything.”- Mr. H. Kathiravan, local taxi driver.

The tourists in turn agreed to this fact that tourism is the main source of pollution and reason for deterioration of resources in the destination. It can be inferred from Table 5 that almost 70 percent of the respondents either completely agreed or agreed that tourism is the main reason for degradation in the destination.

Table 5: Tourism is the Main Reason for Degradation of the Natural Environment in Yelagiri

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Completely Agree	27	33.8	33.8	33.8
Agree	29	36.3	36.3	70.1
Somewhat Agree	18	22.5	22.5	92.6
Disagree	3	3.7	3.7	96.3
Completely Disagree	3	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Further analysis of data revealed that there seems to be a direct relationship between the age of the tourist with the awareness of the concept of responsible tourism. The cross tabulation between age and the awareness of the responsible tourism concept (Table 6), clearly elucidates the fact that respondents in the age bracket 35 and above are mostly aware about the responsible tourism concept. Whereas the same is low for the younger age groups say 20 to 25 and its more than half the respondents who did not know about the concept. The same can be attributed to a number of factors which will further relate to social awareness, general knowledge, and so on.

Table 6: Cross Tabulation between Age and Awareness of Responsible Tourism Concept

Age	Are you aware of the concept of responsible tourism?		Total
	Yes	No	
20 to 25	14	12	26
25 to 30	4	14	18
30 to 35	8	6	14
35 to 40	12	2	14
40 & Above	8	0	8
Total	46	34	80

Irrespective of the age bracket and educational or financial background, the tourists' awareness of responsibility remains moderate based on the inputs from all the stakeholders and tourists themselves.

Summary of Findings

Table 7 illustrates the arguments and findings explained in the above sections. In addition to the previous listed findings, a few more relative findings can be interpreted from Table 7. The expectation of Yelagiri to be a Responsible Tourism destination becomes void when there is no proper waste collection and disposal in place. This is substantiated by the recording of response from almost 70 percent of the respondents who felt that the destination lacked in cleanliness.

Table 7: Summary of Findings

Questions/Statements	Total	Completely Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Completely Disagree (%)	Total (%)
Yelagiri Properly Maintained - Cleanliness	80	3%	5%	22%	41%	30%	100%
Tourism is the Reason for Degradation	80	34%	36%	23%	4%	4%	100%
Well Managed Natural Attractions Necessary	80	37%	34%	17%	5%	7%	100%
Host Community Benefits from RT	80	20%	40%	30%	5%	5%	100%
Governments Role in Maintaining	80	10%	25%	35%	18%	12%	100%
Awareness on Climate Change	80	5%	16%	45%	32%	3%	100%
Natural Resource Protection and Tourism	80	5%	15%	50%	23%	8%	100%

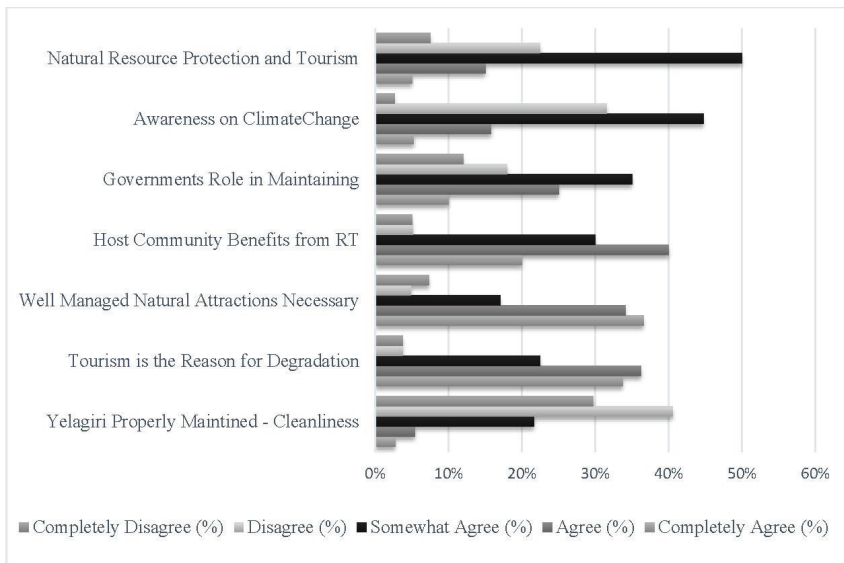


Fig. 2: Summary of Findings

Also, the response of the tourists proves the argument that the natural beauty of a destination plays a major role in attracting tourism as quoted earlier in the literature review section. The importance is considerably given to the better management of the attractions and maintaining them in their natural state without much of adulteration which alters the aesthetic beauty of the destination. When it came to question whether natural resource protection and tourism can coexist, there was a mixed response from the respondents. Almost half of them somewhat agreed to this argument but then there was no concrete establishment for the argument.

Recommendations

Based on the various interactions with the stakeholders in the destination and after analysing the primary and secondary data collected through both qualitative and quantitative tools, the study put forth some of the recommendations or suggestions which could act as an impetus in strengthening the community participation in the development of tourism in Yelagiri and for an improved tourist experience in the destination in a sustainable manner.

- **Improve Responsible and Sustainable Practices:** Yelagiri being one of the popular hill stations in South India must start to adopt the responsible and sustainable practices. Responsible tourism encompasses all forms of

tourism and seeks to minimize negative economic, environmental and social impacts. Therefore, this must be the goal of the various tourism related activities and projects which are ongoing in the hill station.

- **Conduct of Frequent Environment Impact Assessment (EIAs):** It is quite necessary to study and measure the anticipated effects on the environment as regards a proposed development or project. If the likely effects are unacceptable, design measures or other relevant mitigation measures can be taken to reduce or avoid those effects. This process constitutes the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and it is very important in fragile destinations like Yelagiri where sudden change to the environment can cause a huge impact.
- **Regular Check on Carrying Capacity:** Carrying Capacity is the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at a given point of time, without violating the physical, economic, socio-cultural, and environment dynamics and without an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction. In a small hill station like Yelagiri, it is very much essential to take into account of the carrying capacity as it will have a considerable effect on the environment as well as the visitors' experience.
- **Decision Making and Consultative Powers for Local Community:** The involvement of the community members or community participation is vital in any form of sustainable tourism or responsible tourism or ecotourism. Their involvement is vital in the tourism development decision-making process; in the sharing of tourism benefits, and the contribution of tourism development to poverty alleviation. If this coexistence is absent, then there will be negative effects over a period of time and the project will never be sustainable.
- **Observing the Norms and Codes of Conduct at the Destination:** The tourists must invest, respect and develop the local culture and should not exploit it in any way.
- **Ensuring the Safety and Comfort:** It is the responsibility of the local community members to enable tourists to relish the charms of Yelagiri undisturbed. They should instil confidence in the minds of the tourists.
- **Create Opportunities or Platform for Sustained Livelihood of Local Community Members Through Tourism:** It is the responsibility of the various stakeholders involved in the tourism activities in the region and receive monetary benefits from it to formulate policies or create platforms for the sustained livelihood of the local community members. An example of such can be employing the local community members for various tourism related jobs, promoting the local handicrafts, etc.

- **Promoting Experiential Tourism Over Sightseeing:** The major reason for tourists staying less than two nights in the destination can be attributed to the limited availability of the sightseeing points. This can be overcome by promoting experiential tourism over sightseeing in the destination. The untapped cultural potential in the destination can also be utilised to bring out more enriched form of Tourists' participation.
- **Repositioning Yelagiri from a Weekend Getaway to a Weeklong Destination in a Sustainable Manner:** The idea of metamorphosing Yelagiri from a weekend getaway to a weeklong destination might sound ambitious. But then the effects of doing so will be tremendous and beneficial. The concept of weekend stays has only increased the demand during weekends with limited number of supply and in the other days of the week it will be vice versa. So it is always important to maintain a proper balance and manage seasonality. Matching demand and supply is highly essential.
- **Employ Sustainable Means of Waste Management:** A destination can be branded on how clean it is based on the technique in which the waste is being disposed off. Therefore, it is quite necessary to employ better and sustainable means of waste management in hotels, resorts, restaurants, etc. The efficacy of solid waste management can maintain Yelagiri pristine clean.
- **Enhance Tourist Facilities:** Tourists' experience in a destination will determine the quality of the destination. Hence, it is absolutely important to provide adequate and better tourist facilities. Tourist facilities may include hygienic and accessible public toilets, tourist information centres, tourist police, proper signages and display of information, etc.

Conclusion

Tourism is growing leaps and bounds world over and so too are the impacts. That being the case, tourism is being projected on the one hand as an industry which needs to regulate its impacts and on the other hand the sunrise phenomenon is regarded as a catalyst to promote Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the globe. Responsible Tourism (RT) initiatives are essentially giving fillip to the SDGs in most of the renowned tourism havens. The beneficial impacts of responsible tourism are being realised in destinations with fragile natural resources; mainly beach and hill destinations. With the same premise, the proposal for this research work tool shape which eventually progressed through various tracks in sync with the state of affairs of destination Yelagiri. Responsible Tourism is a multi-pronged approach

involving various stakeholders who plan, market, manage, and compete with each other in a responsible manner. Therefore, the data collection process for this study encompassed diverse respondents and a mixed-method inquiry. The analytical output underpins the need to strengthen the prevailing RT practices and also the establishment of novel and concrete responsible tourism ventures and activities. Inception of eco-friendly infrastructure through community based endeavours is a sound pointer in that direction. Curtailing environmental degradation through a participatory approach is yet another recommendation made to foster sustainable tourism development in Yelagiri. Furthermore, this study lays stress on the fact that providing thrust to the consultative powers of the host community groups could give impetus to the sustainable development plans of the destination. “Getting the Ideals of Responsible Tourism Right” is what is going to decide the futuristic course of development initiatives in Yelagiri.

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