

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT**

**UNVEILING THE UNLIMITED TOURISM POTENTIALS OF KERALA  
BACKWATERS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

**MRP (H)/13-14/KLMG027/UGC-SWRO, DATED 15-FEBRUARY-14**

**Submitted to**

**UGC, NEW DELHI**

**By**

**DR. TEJIL THOMAS**

Assistant Professor

PG and Research Department of Commerce

St. Thomas College, Pala

Kottayam, PIN - 686574

**MAY 2017**

# **UNVEILING THE UNLIMITED TOURISM POTENTIALS OF KERALA BACKWATERS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Kerala backwaters offer the tourists the most incredible tour destinations for pleasure and holiday enjoyments. The backwater destinations of Kerala are made up of interconnected waterways, rivers, lakes and bays. It has a unique ecosystem, which perfectly blends scenic beauty, soothing climate, traditional waterways travel on houseboats and delicious spicy foods for both foreign and inland tourists a wonderful experience of an aquatic life. Yet, many of them are still underutilized and waiting for a flash mob. The Destination Management Organizations in organized and unorganized sectors have chalked out many plans and strategies to make utilize the potentials of those destinations for the well-being of the state. However, a hand in to hand movement of the concerned Government bodies and the local public is inevitable for attaining the intended level of conservation and sustainable development of backwater spots with natural beauty and tranquility.

Involving the local community is key, not only to carry out conservation work, but to ensure the sustainability of these sites. The contribution of conservation volunteers is crucial and cannot be ignored because without their help many local sites would not have been transformed into pleasant as they are today. The active participation will give volunteers and local people an involvement in the development of local area and a voice in what is going on surrounding to them. Once the destination is an embarrassment for local people, it may become an integral part of their lives. Finally, it will pave the way for preservation of natural resources and promotion of traditional products, arts and beauty of Kerala. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of Kerala has set out a success mantra for unveiling the real potentials of tourism with cooperation and participation of Kudumbasree units, farming groups, cultural and environmental groups, clubs, local business people etc. This is the matter of interest for the researcher to stick on the element of community participation for exploring the unlimited potentials of backwaters in Kerala.

This study intends to analyse the role of community participation for the sustainable development of backwater destinations in Kerala and to identify the constraints to be

overcome by backwater destinations in Kerala in order to successfully market the products and services. Primary data were primarily used in this research which were collected from 208 samples from different classes namely business people, houseboat service providers, Artisans, SHG members and tourists. Interview Schedule was the main tools used to collect the pertinent data from the selected sample of respondents. Descriptive statistical tools like percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used for describing the collected data and inferential statistical tools ANOVA and Welch ANOVA were used to test the hypothesis with the help of SPSS 22.0 software. This study provides a three-dimensional view of the local communities' role in sustainable tourism development in Kerala backwater destinations.

The local communities are having greater potential in contributing economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability and unveiling the potential of backwater tourism in Kerala. Artisans play a vital role in blotting the culture and traditions of Kerala through souvenirs made from indigenous products. Backwater destinations gained the present popularity because of the unforgettable experience of having a houseboat journey through lakes and rivers. Tourists' traffic to backwater destinations are directed mainly by houseboat services. Women involvement in the field of tourism related business and allied services of providing traditional food and beverages, handicrafts items, changed quality of hospitality services at backwater destinations in Kerala. Local business people are the main hunters of opportunities of backwater tourism. Local hospitality, traditional and spicy dining experiences, village life experiences and adventurous watersports provided by them gained attention of global tourists. Along with the local communities, both domestic and foreign tourists play a pivotal role in tapping of the potentials of tourist destinations. The study assessed the perception and contribution of various local communities towards the economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability of backwater destinations in Kerala for unveiling their tourism potentials.

Increase in the price of goods and services, supply of outside products, solid waste management problem, dumping of plastic wastes, pollution of lakes because of oil spilling from houseboats, Lack of cleanliness, house boat parking issues, sand filling of ponds and wetlands, transmitting diseases, lack of interest of new generation in agriculture,

overcrowding of destinations, wastage of food items, lack of proper support from Govt., poor wage/salary to employees, commodification of arts and culture of Kerala, cultural deprivation and poor marketing facilities for indigenous products are the main constraints to be overcome for the development of backwater tourism in Kerala.

Backwaters in Kerala offer abundant market opportunities in general and particular for House boats/Kettuvallams/Ferry Services, Traditional art forms, handicrafts and spices. The richness of Kerala backwaters is apt for water based transportation and festivals. Houseboats/Kettuvallams, Ferry Services, Boat Races and Sea planes are some of the primary options for investment. It also boosts the other mode of transportation as part of tourism development there. Aircrafts, luxury cars, luxury coaches, taxis, caravans, and railways are stood benefited out of backwater tourism development in Kerala. Promotion of hospitality services is remarkable. It is found that hotels, resorts,eco-lodges, bed and breakfast, guest houses, homestays, camping facilities, heritage homes, meeting hubs, tree houses, paying guest accommodation and rest houses have good market at backwater destinations. As far concerned the investors' point of view, apart from the hospitality organisations, backwater tourism in Kerala invites attention to the possibilities of travel agencies, tour operations, MICE centres, trade fairs, event management, guide training centres, cleaning units, laundry service, catering centres, floral and decoration, information kiosks, publishing of maps, restaurants, pay-and-use-toilets, coffee/snacks bar, herbal gardens and logistics. One of the focal areas of Kerala tourism is the marketing of souvenirs and handicrafts which depict the real tradition and culture of Kerala. Handicrafts from local products, ethnic boutiques, traditional jewellery, handloom weavers, ayurvedic soaps, balms, wood carving, woven fibre baskets, mats and curios, brass and bell metal works, cane products, ivory works, lacquer ware, sandalwood carving, wooden toys, kathakali masks, and traditional items like coir products, bamboo products, forestry products etc. are greatly marketed at these destinations. General Service providers are also seeking opportunities at backwater destinations. Security services, information systems, multi-lingual guide services, wayside amenity centres, wellness, centres, medicine, ayurvedic spas, health clubs, entertainments and parks are some of the possibilities in this regard. Kerala backwaters are particular in some of the products and services. House boats/Kettuvallams/Ferry Services are the main source of attraction of backwater tourism.

The mode of construction of houseboats, sea/lake food dining experience, sight-seeing, feel of aquatic transportation and relaxation are the points of magnetism in this regard. Govt. has initiated certain programmes like 'Nadi Darshan' to explore market opportunities. There is a greater demand for traditional art forms of Kerala like Kathakali, Ottamthullal, Chakyarkoothu, Krishnanattam, Koodiyattam, Padayani, Kalarippayattu, Pavakathakali, Theyyam, Velakali, Thiruvathirakali, Kolkali, murals, sculpture and architecture as they reflect the life and outlook of the great culture of the State and its people. Kerala rose to fame all around the world solely because of its monopoly over spices. People in Kerala are experts in the cultivation of quality spices. Kerala is famed for the production and export of the most sought-after spices, Pepper, the 'King of Spices'. Cardamom the 'Queen of Spices', Cloves the flavouring agent, Cinnamon the antioxidant activity, Ginger, Turmeric, Tamarind the Indian Date, Curry Leaves and the Nutmeg are the famous spices of Kerala. Both Inland and foreign tourists are interested in the spices and spicy cuisines.