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**PERCEPTION OF TOURISTS TOWARDS ECOTOURISM - WITH REFERENCE TO SELECT DESTINATIONS IN  
TAMIL NADU**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Ecotourism supports the objectives of sustainable development. Ecotourism refers to sustainable development of environment, local community and visitor of within the tourism destination. This study is useful to the government to generate the income and it also helps to create employment opportunities. Nowadays, ecotourism management has provided insufficient infrastructure facilities in the destination which has encounter many challenges such as lack of quality of air, water and food facilities, inadequate entertainment facilities, improper disposal recyclable wastage, lack of transportation, misconceptions of natural resources, technological advancement, pollution problems, etc. The objective of the study was to identify the factor influencing of infrastructure facilities in ecotourism destination among the tourist and to measure the expectation and satisfaction of tourists towards infrastructure facilities in ecotourism destination. The analysis of the study was reveals that tourist is satisfied at all the variable of the ecotourism destination with infrastructure facilities. This study finally concluded that ecotourism management provided good facilities to tourists who have visited in the destination. Infrastructure facilities of ecotourism has maintained properly.*

**KEYWORDS**

infrastructure facilities, ecotourism management, sustainable development.

**INTRODUCTION**

Whenever we go green thinking's comes to our mind. The source of green thinking is under threat for feasible living of people due to man made things. There are so many recreation facilities available which are created by human beings and charged by the service provider. Recreation provide by the nature is available at free of cost which cannot be estimated. Human yet to develop machines to calculate the value of recreation or pleasure given by the nature created place. This ecotourism has delighted the concepts of preservation and conservation of nature by responsible travel. Ecotourism supports the objectives of sustainable development. Ecotourism refers to sustainable development of environment, local community and visitor of within the tourism destination. Hence, ecotourism depends on these categories, which helps to sustainable development of recreation because of ecotourism provides to an effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity to environment and helps protect the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful planet, its supports to local society which is increasing local capacity building and employment opportunities. Ecotourism is an effective vehicle for empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty or alleviating poverty and to achieve sustainable development as well as the UNWTO (United National World Tourism Organization) has given the node to adopt the resolution which recognized ecotourism as a key to fight against poverty, the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development under the title 'Promotion of ecotourism for poverty eradication and environment protection'. Finally, ecotourism support to visitor for emphasis on enriching personal experiences and environmental awareness through interpretation, ecotourism promotes greater understanding and appreciation for nature, local society, and culture. This success of an ecotourism depends to a great extent on its awareness about its surrounding environment and adaptability to change in the environment. This achievement can get only through tourist knowledge and awareness about ecotourism. Tourists must perceive environment awareness and knowledge about ecotourism because it will create a chance for sustainable development to protect the environment and helps the Mother Nature to serve the infinite generation yet to come. Tourist perception will be promoted to generate income source in ecotourism destination and construct and operate low impact ecotourism facilities. The present study will make an attempt to work on constructs which helps to build a strong positive perception on ecotourism and pass the less impacted tourism destination to the future generation.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Phan Quoc Dung (2016)** has conducted a study titled "Factors affecting the attractions of foreign tourists to community ecotourism destinations in the Mekong Delta Vietnam" investigated tourists towards attraction of ecotourism. Specifically, the study is related five factor groups were affected such as Attraction, Behavioral Control Perception, local residents, Natural ecological conditions, Facilities - infrastructure. The study framed the objective after analyzed the data that identify the factors affecting the attractions of foreign tourists to community ecotourism destinations in the Mekong Delta, determine the priority order of the impact degree of factors influencing the attractions of foreign tourists to community ecotourism destinations in the Mekong Delta and propose solutions to enhance the attractions of foreign tourists to community ecotourism destinations in the Mekong Delta.

**R Rajesh (2013)**, researched on "Impact of Tourist Perceptions, Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction on Destination Loyalty: A Conceptual Model" aims at understanding the tourists perception towards tourism destination. It has four models constructs such as Historical and Cultural Attractions, Destination Affordability, Travel Environment, Natural Attractions, Entertainments and Infrastructure. The study result reveals that tourist perception, destination image and tourist satisfaction directly influence destination loyalty. The outcomes of the study have significant managerial implications for destination marketing managers.

**Syamsul Herman Mohammad Afandi (2013)**, in this study analyzed the "Visitors' Satisfaction towards Service and Facilities in Kilim Karst Geoforest Park, Langkawi". The main objective of this study is to measure the level of visitors' satisfaction towards quality of services and facilities at KKGP. This study uses the ECOSERV dimension that has been adapted from SERVQUAL for accessing the quality of environment, services, and facilities provided in ecotourism site. The study uses the expectation-performance analysis that has been adapted from Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) to identify the attributes in services, facilities and environment that are need priority for improvement. The result of the study found the level of visitors' satisfaction towards quality of environment, services and facilities in the park is low. The results also suggest that there are some opportunities for improving the services and facilities in KKGP especially for management, planner and service provider.

M. Ramdas, B. Mohamed (2014), have presented a research paper "Visitor Perceptions on the Impacts of Tourism Activities, Development and Infrastructure on the Environment of Perhentian Islands". The aims of the study were find out the tourists' perception on the impact of tourism activities, development and infrastructure to the environment of Perhentian Islands. The results indicate that there is a significant number of moderate and high levels of agreement that tourism activities, development and infrastructure are effecting the island's environment. It was also found that foreign tourist had significantly higher level of agreement for both variables than local tourist. However, it was found that there was no significant difference among gender for both variables. Establishing carrying capacity and embedding environmental education in sustainable tourism management would help broaden the perception of tourists.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Ecotourism destination plays an important role in the development of Indian economy. It earns more income to government. Tamil Nadu ecotourism has variety of natural resources like beautiful hills station, graceful forests, wonderful beaches, lakes, waterfalls and sanctuaries of flora and fauna are significant in attracting tourist. The main aim of the study is to find out the tourists perception towards ecotourism destination in Tamil Nadu. Ecotourism has been contributing to the overall improvement of tourist's perception. Infrastructure facilities has always been considered as an essential to ecotourism development because it was bring in its wave a spurt of positive perception directly and indirectly to tourists. Infrastructure facilities of the ecotourism destination would likely to create attitudes of revisiting the destination in future, to minimize all the lacking facilities of destination, and to be satisfied to ecotourism destination. Hence there is a need to study focus on infrastructure facilities of ecotourism destination in Tamil Nadu. This study is useful to the government to generate the income and it also helps to create employment opportunities. In the near future, this kind of study is essential to provide policy input to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation. Therefore, this study made an attempt to analyse the perception of tourists towards selected ecotourism destination in Tamil Nadu.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ecotourism is a great blessing for the nation as well as it plays a vital role in the economic development of the country. The perception of the tourists depends to a great extent of infrastructure facilities such as the availability and quality of good ecotourism facilities, basic management in ecotourism destination, improvement in environmental resources, and upgrading the entertainment facilities in place of interest. These are encouraging the tourist to revisit the destination, lead to be satisfaction, and influence the stay for a long period. Nowadays, ecotourism management has provided insufficient infrastructure facilities in the destination which has encounter many challenges such as lack of quality of air, water and food facilities, inadequate entertainment facilities, improper disposal recyclable wastage, lack of transportation, misconceptions of natural resources, technological advancement, pollution problems, etc. These are making negative impact of destination and discourage the destination image and provide negative perception of tourists. Based on the above problem, the present study will try to evaluate the perception of tourists in the context of the ecotourism destination in Tamil Nadu.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the factor influencing of infrastructure facilities in ecotourism destination among the tourist.
2. To measure the expectation and satisfaction of tourists towards infrastructure facilities in ecotourism destination.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is empirical and analytical in nature.

#### SAMPLE SIZE

Through used the Z score formula the sample size has framed. 666 ecotourists are selected in the selected destination of Tamil Nadu.

#### SAMPLING METHOD

The study adopted judgment sampling method adopted of non-random sampling technique.

#### DATA COLLECTION

The data collected through survey of 666 tourists of different destination of Tamil Nadu such as Marina beach, Hogenakkal, Kodaikanal, Ooty and Vedanthangal. A well structured interview schedules was prepared to record responses.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Collected data was analyzed through SPSS. The simple percentage, one sample t-test and paired t test was used for analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES OF THE RESPONDENTS

TABLE 1

Factors		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	439	65.90
	Female	227	34.10
Residential Place	Urban	162	24.30
	Semi Urban	90	13.50
	Rural	414	62.20
Marital Status	Married	309	46.40
	Single	124	18.60
	Unmarried	227	34.10
	Widow	6	0.90
Age	Below 20 years	57	8.60
	21-30 years	412	61.90
	31-40 years	65	9.80
	Above 41 years	132	19.80
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 10000	269	40.40
	Rs. 10001 – 20000	75	11.30
	Rs. 20001 – 30000	201	30.20
Education level	Above Rs. 30001	121	18.20
	SSLC	71	10.70
	HSC	98	14.70
	Degree	232	34.80
	Professional Course	222	33.30
	Other	43	6.50
Occupation	Student/ Researcher	199	29.90
	Private Employed	138	20.70
	Unemployed	152	22.80
	Govt. Employed	111	16.70
	Professionals	66	9.90
<b>Total</b>		<b>666</b>	<b>100.00</b>

(Source: Primary data)

The finding of the study revealed that the majority of the tourists were belonged to the age group of 21-30 years. The gender details of the tourists out of 666 tourists, only 66 per cent of the tourists were male members and 34 per cent of the tourists were female members. Hence, the majority of the tourists were belonged to the males group. Educational qualification of the tourists reveals that 39 per cent of the tourists had the degree level qualification. Of the total tourists 30 per cent of the tourists were students/ researcher. Out of the 666 tourists 46 per cent of the tourists were married and the monthly income of the tourists revealed that 40 per cent tourists earn below Rs. 10000 as their monthly income. Majority of the tourists were belonged to rural area.

2. EXPECTATION AND SATISFACTION LEVEL OF THE TOURISTS OF INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES IN ECOTOURISM DESTINATION HYPOTHESIS

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between expectation level and satisfaction level of tourist towards infrastructural facilities provided at the eco-tourism destination.

TABLE 2

Particulars		Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlation	t value	p value
Easy accessibility of Hotels and Restaurant	Expectation	3.24	1.18	0.179	-9.55	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.74	0.90			
Availability of Bank / ATM facilities	Expectation	3.16	1.11	0.186	-6.04	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.48	1.02			
Availability of first aid facilities	Expectation	3.46	1.13	0.382	-2.44	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.58	1.01			
Availability of tourist guide	Expectation	3.14	1.14	0.024	-7.46	0.543
	Satisfaction	3.60	1.13			
Recycler of renewable resources	Expectation	3.26	1.17	0.394	3.23	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.10	1.14			
Quality and availability of frequent transportation	Expectation	3.60	1.20	0.540	-1.89	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.68	1.04			
Quality of air, water and food facilities	Expectation	3.49	1.15	0.104	2.01	<0.007**
	Satisfaction	3.37	1.08			
Interaction with local people	Expectation	3.39	1.07	0.123	2.29	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.26	1.16			
Dustbin for proper disposal recyclable wastage	Expectation	3.35	1.05	0.284	2.43	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.23	1.17			
Hygienic atmosphere of the tourist location	Expectation	3.46	1.03	0.097	2.20	<0.001**
	Satisfaction	3.34	1.05			

\*\* denoted that significant at 1%

\* denoted that Significant at 5%

From the above table shows the results reveal that the most of the facilities given at the eco-tourism destination has met the expectation level of the tourists who visited the place. The infrastructural facilities provided at the destination are satisfying the tourists to the expected levels. The results are giving the view that the tourists know what to expect from these destinations with regards to the infrastructural facilities.

The infrastructural facilities that was as expected are Easy accessibility of Hotels and Restaurant (0.000), Availability of Bank / ATM facilities (0.000), Availability of first aid facilities/ safety equipments (0.000), Recycler of renewable resources (0.000), Quality and availability of frequent transportation (0.000), Quality of air, water and food facilities (0.007), Interaction with local people (0.001), Exclusive dustbin for proper disposal recyclable wastage (0.000), Hygienic atmosphere of the tourist location (0.013). All the facilities are statistically significant at one percent level. These facilities have been able to satisfy the tourists to the expected level based on the analysis.

### 3. FACTOR INFLUENCING OF INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES TOWARDS ECOTOURISM DESTINATION

#### HYPOTHESIS

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between factor influencing levels towards infrastructure facilities of ecotourism destination.

TABLE 3

Particulars	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p value
Easy accessibility accommodation	3.72	1.00	19.89	<0.001**
Accessibility of destination transportation	3.46	1.03	12.91	<0.001**
Availability of hygienic food	3.19	1.02	6.05	<0.001**
Suitable climate conditions	3.19	1.10	5.77	<0.001**
Waste management practice	3.49	1.06	13.10	<0.001**

\*\* denoted significant at 1%

The above table explicates the influencing level of the tourists towards the infrastructure facilities of the eco-tourism destination of Tamil Nadu. Based on the results the null hypothesis was rejected all five variables that are selected for the study. The tourists highly influenced towards the infrastructure facilities of ecotourism destination.

The eco-tourism destination infrastructure facilities that was as influenced are easy accessibility accommodation, accessibility of destination transportation, availability of hygienic food, suitable climate conditions and waste management practice in ecotourism destination. From having above, the analysis of results revealed that tourists were known about the feature of the ecotourism destination. In this context with factor of infrastructure facilities are highly influenced among the tourists.

The tourists are highly influenced regards with all variables of infrastructure facilities of ecotourism destination given in the interview schedule explains that ecotourism destination has successful maintained infrastructure facilities. Finally, tourists also well have known about the ecotourism infrastructure facilities.

#### FINDINGS

- Majority of the tourists were belonged to the age group of 21-30 years. The gender details of the tourists out of 666 tourists, only 66 per cent of the tourists were male members. The majority of the tourists were belonged to the males group. 39 per cent of the tourists had the degree level qualification. Of the total tourists 30 per cent of the tourists were students/ researcher. 46 per cent of the tourists were married and 40 per cent tourists earn below Rs. 10000 monthly incomes.
- Based on the paired t-test of infrastructure facilities of ecotourism destination that tourist is satisfied at all the variable of the ecotourism destination.
- The one sample t-test revealed that the entire infrastructure variables are highly influenced in ecotourism destination among the tourists.

#### SUGGESTIONS

- In the destination inadequate tourists guide so ecotourism destination management should increase tourist guide.
- The tourists are feel that ecotourism management must have concentrated on hygienic food providing to tourists in destination and based on the climate condition ecotourism management should show the natural scenery.

#### CONCLUSION

Analysis and survey results revealed that the tourists are well known of ecotourism basic principles. Ecotourism destination not only enhanced eco-friendly attitudes to tourists and also improved the positive experience to tourists. From the point of the study it clearly shows that ecotourism management provided good facilities to tourists who have visited in the destination. Infrastructure facilities of ecotourism has maintained properly. In this connection with ecotourism fulfilled the tourist's satisfaction and highly influenced to tourists towards infrastructure facilities. Finally, the study concluded the tourists have positive perception towards ecotourism destination in selected destination of Tamil Nadu.

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