

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Tourism industry has made substantial contribution in terms of burgeoning foreign exchange earnings, employment generation for skilled and semiskilled, unleashing entrepreneurial opportunities concomitantly with preservation and conservation of resources and culture. In developing economies like India the role of tourism cannot be undermined as it is expected to play a key role in generation of employment and income opportunities, thus reducing regional imbalances created through forward and backward linkage effects on local industries or enterprises.

Ecotourism is a new concept in tourism, which was originally sparked off by the idea of making harmonious co-existence with nature. It is about the combination of conservation, community centered and sustainable travel. Ecotourism has assumed a lot of significance in the contemporary context and it is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry.

The concept of ecotourism experience encompasses the aspects leading to travel experience at the ecotourism destination. The evaluation of ecotourism experience includes one's personal experience gained at the destination through the tangible and intangible attributes at the destination like flora and fauna, natural environment, service quality, ecotourism activities. Ecotourism experience can be defined as the culmination of the experiences of the tourist gained from destination attributes, service quality provided at the destination, unique and memorable experiences gained through the ecotourism activities at the destination. It has subjective components- as it depends on one's assessment of the destination, quality of services provided at the destination, relaxation and enjoyment at the destination. However objective components like landscape, availability of flora and fauna, which are external to an individual can also influence ecotourism experience.

The concept of future behavioral Intention is linked to intentional loyalty as it encompasses the aspects pertaining to intention of the tourist to say positive or negative aspects of the destination, recommend the destination to others and also revisit the destination. It is purely subjective as it indicates one's intention, however it assumes significance as it is expected to influence the actual behavior.

The concepts of ecotourism experience and future behavioral intention are unique in the context of a tourist; and this needs to be evaluated as it could influence the visitation at the destination. In this context, an analysis of the factors influencing repeat visitation intention/ recommendation intention of ecotourist destination is required to understand the underlying determinant of future behavioral intention which is believed to affect the earnings from the destination.

Evaluation of ecotourist experience and their future behavioural intention has not been found so far in the context of India. Hence the study focussing on 'An analysis of ecotourism experience, satisfaction and future behavioural intention with specific reference to Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala' was formulated with the following objectives.

- To study the difference in components of ecotourism experience in peak and lean seasons at Periyar-Tiger Reserve
- To identify the dimensions of eco tourism experience as perceived by eco tourists
- To identify the dimensions of future behavioral intention
- To test the relationship between ecotourism experience and ecotourist satisfaction
- To study the relationship between ecotourism experience, ecotourist satisfaction and future behavioral intention of tourists visiting Periyar Tiger Reserve and
- To identify the problems of ecotourists in peak and lean season in Periyar Tiger Reserve

By adopting proportionate random sampling (1 percent) of the total number of tourists, the number of sample respondents in peak and lean season were decided. The study covered 477 domestic tourists and 46 foreign tourists. Hence the total size of the sample was 523.

The study was related to 2014-15. The pilot study was conducted during October –November, 2014 for 63 respondents . The final data collection was done during the period December 2014 to April 2015 (for peak season) and from June 2015 to August 2015 (for lean season). Cronbach Alpha was calculated to check the reliability and validity of the interview schedule.

The required data were collected through focused group discussion and by administering an interview schedule to the respondents. The interview schedule had four sections. **Section A** of the interview schedule was related to general information pertaining to age, gender, educational qualification, employment, income, marital status and nationality. **Section B** consisted of statements for identifying the dimensions of ecotourism experience. **Section C** consisted of statements pertaining to post trip satisfaction. **Section D** consisted of statements to examine the future behavioural intention.

The study tried to develop C-OAR-SE scale to identify the dimensions of ecotourism experience. The scale developed for ecotourism experience was validated through common method of variance, composite reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity and nomological validity.

The study used Likert rating scale, Analysis of variance, Factor analysis, Garrett ranking and Kruskal Wallis test. Further structural equation model was fitted.

The data were analysed in three stages.

- The first attempt was to identify the existence of four distinct factors with regard to ecotourism experience construct by performing an exploratory factor analysis of 27 indicators used for measurement. The analysis confirmed existence of four factors and in the process two indicator variables were eliminated due to low communalities.

- The second attempt was to develop measurement models for all latent constructs considered for the study. Using confirmatory factor analysis and by testing the goodness of fit, measurement models were developed and final indicators -22 indicators capable of measuring the constructs were finalized.
- Thirdly, the structural model with all the constructs which are measured either as reflective or formative were tested for it's ability to represent the data as per guidelines for testing using Warp PLS 2.0.

5.1 Findings of the study:

A. Socio- economic profile of the respondents:

- Majority of the domestic tourists respondents, (39.20 percent), foreign tourist respondents (54.34 percent) and total respondents (40.53 percent) belonged to the age group of 30 to 40 years.
- Majority of domestic tourist respondents (79.45 percent) and foreign tourist respondents (65.21 percent) were males. As a whole 78 percent of the total respondents were males.
- Of total domestic tourists ,(67.71 percent) have completed graduation while the corresponding percentage of foreign tourists respondents was 73.91 percent. Of the total respondents, 68.26 percent of the total respondents have completed graduation.
- Of the domestic tourists - 88.68 percent were employed and of foreign tourist respondents - 95.65 percent were employed. As a whole 89.29 percent of the total respondents were employed.
- Majority of domestic tourist respondents (76.93 percent) were earning the income of Rs. 5 to 10 lakhs per annum. However majority of foreign tourist respondents, 97.82 percent were belonging to income category of above Rs. 10 lakhs per annum.

- Of the total domestic tourist respondents 74.42 were married while 91.30 percent of foreign tourist respondents were married and 75.90 percent of total respondents were married.

B. Motivations to visit ecotourism destination

- Majority of domestic tourists (35.84 percent) and foreign tourists (45.65 percent) have visited Periyar Tiger Reserve for exclusively enjoying ecotourism activities. The other important motivations include enjoyment with family and relaxation.

C. Sources of information for the respondents about ecotourism destination

- Internet has been the major source of information on Periyar as 58.49 percent of the domestic tourists' respondents and 52.17 percent of foreign tourist respondents have relied on internet. Word of mouth publicity had also played a prominent role as 33.27 percent of them have been influenced by that factor.

D. Analysis of seasonality in ecotourism

- Majority of domestic respondents (85.95 percent) and foreign respondents (84.78 percent) have visited Periyar Tiger Reserve in peak season.

E. Analysis of Ecotourism experience

Components of ecotourism experience in peak and lean season

- The study identified the components of ecotourism experience as accommodation, display of art forms, availability of eco friendly technology, flora, amenities, number of ecotourism activities, availability of transport, fauna, local culture influence, reasonableness of price, protection of environment, quality of service, security, quality of information, scenic beauty, enjoyment, memorable, physical comfort, mental relaxation, uniqueness, interaction with local population, age, gender, education, income and marital status.

- The application of ANOVA revealed that there is a significant difference in accommodation, amenities and ecotourism activities in peak and lean season at Periyar Tiger Reserve.

Identification of dimensions of Ecotourism Experience: Exploratory Factor Analysis

- By using the exploratory factor analysis, study identified 4 latent constructs - Tangible attributes, Intangible attributes, Demographic attributes, Psychological attributes leading to ecotourism experience. The identified factors of all these constructs had an Eigen value greater than 1, and explained over 60.90 of the variance for ecotourism experience. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.913 The Bartlett Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$) with a Chi Square value of 7409.59 with 351 degrees of freedom.. Communalities between measured items loaded on the exploratory factor model varied from 0.446 to 0.757.

Confirmation of Dimensions of Ecotourism experience:

- The scale developed exclusively for measuring ecotourism experience was validated by performing confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory analysis was done using AMOS 16. The indicators (confirmed indicators) were measured in reflective manner and was found to be significantly linked to corresponding latent dimensions of the construct (ecotourism experience).
- Goodness of fit statistics for the scale developed indicates that the model was fit as the values of absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, parsimony fit measures were within the threshold values.
- The paths shown in the model were significant as the critical ratio values were greater than ± 1.96 and standard residual covariance was below 2.58.
- The composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated for the minor constructs. The value of composite reliability was .834 for tangible attributes and average variance extracted was .501.

For intangible attributes it was .882 and .528 respectively. For demographic attributes the values were .842 and .567 respectively and for psychological attributes, it was .834 and .567 respectively.

- All of the measurement items represented their factors significantly as critical ratio of every item exceeded 1.96. The convergent validity was established since the factor loadings ranged from .729 to .858 and no loading was less than recommended value of .5.
- Discriminant validity was confirmed by examining correlation among constructs. Since none of the correlations among variables were above 0.85, the model was proved to be valid.
- After the confirmatory factor analysis 22 indicators are identified. Tangible attributes have 8 indicators which are accommodation, amenities, display of art forms, ecofriendly technology, flora and fauna, number of ecotourism activities, Intangible attributes have 7 indicators which are quality of service, local culture influence, reasonableness of price, environment education, quality of information, security, scenic beauty, Psychological attributes have 5 indicators which are Enjoyment, memorable, uniqueness, physical comfort, mental relaxation and Demographic attributes have 4 indicators which are age, gender ,level of education, marital status.

F. Analysis of ecotourist satisfaction:

- The construct of ecotourist satisfaction was measured in reflective manner. Reliability of the constructs was found through composite reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha and Average variance extracted. All of these which are obtained after the estimation of the model are above the threshold limits (composite reliability coefficient (0.912), Cronbach's alpha (0.883), and average variance extracted(AVE=.632).
- Convergent validity was established as all the loadings are above 0.5 and are significant at $p < 0.05$.

G. Analysis of Future Behavioural Intention:

- The construct of future behavioural intention was measured in reflective manner. For future behavioural Intention the calculated composite reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha and Average variance extracted were above the threshold limits (composite reliability coefficient (0.814), Cronbach's alpha (0.820) and average variance extracted (AVE=.582).
- Convergent validity was established as all the loadings were above 0.5 and were significant at $p < 0.05$.

H. Analysis of relationship between ecotourism experience, ecotourist satisfaction and future behavioural intention:

- Structural Equation Modelling using Warp PLS 2.0 was used for construction of model to analyse the relationship between ecotourism experience ecotourist satisfaction and future behavioural intention.
- The model has acceptable predictive and explanatory quality as the data were represented reasonably well by the model constructed. In the model developed, APC =.319, ARS=0.990, AVIF=.1.369 and p values were $< .01$; indicating the predictive and explanatory quality of the model.
- The model has found the existence of significant relationship between ecotourism experience and ecotourist satisfaction ($\beta=0.18$) The strongest indicator contributing towards ecotourist satisfaction is the satisfaction derived from ecotourism programs at the destination. (standard regression coefficient was .805).
- The model has also found the existence of significant relationship between ecotourist satisfaction and future behavioural intention (FBI) ($\beta=0.35$). Among the indicators of FBI, revisit intention was the strongest (.781).

I. Constraints faced by Tourists visiting Periyar Tiger Reserve

- The constraints faced by tourists visiting Periyar Tiger Reserve include overcrowding, lack of coordination among staff at the entrance/ticket counter and boat jetty, serpentine queue leading to long waiting time, restrictions on

dress when the tourists opt for nature walk, lack of cleanliness and hygiene, technological constraints pertaining to communication inside the protected area, restrictions on non renewable source of energy , lack of amenities like toilets and canteens inside the protected area and lack of orientation about the insect bites during the nature walk .

J. Suggestion given by the respondents to improve at Periyar Tiger Reserve

- Majority of the respondents have suggested the E-Ticketing facilities for all ecotourism activities and better coordination among the staff at Periyar Tiger Reserve.

5.2 Conclusion

- There exists no difference in ecotourism experience dimensions in the peak and lean season at Periyar Tiger Reserve except in the case of accommodation and amenities.
- The dimensions of ecotourism experience identified are tangible, intangible, psychological and demographic. Among these demographic attributes are having a stronger influence on ecotourism experience.
- There is a significant relationship between ecotourism experience and ecotourism satisfaction.
- Revisit intention has a strong influence on future behavioural intention.
- There is a significant relationship between ecotourism experience and future behavioural intention and
- The major constraint faced by tourist at Periyar Tiger Reserve is lack of coordination among the staff at Periyar Tiger Reserve.

5.3 Recommendations to promote ecotourism at Periyar tiger reserve:

- The ecotourism destinations can be promoted by providing quality ecotourism experience to tourists. Quality ecotourism experience can be ensured through various ecotourism activities offered as attractive packages at reasonable rates depending on the carrying capacity of destinations.

- Proper monitoring and surveillance through coordination among staff members engaged in different ecotourism activities at the destination is required to prevent overcrowding and congestion, especially in peak seasons. This will also provide an opportunity to ecotourists to enjoy all the ecotourism activities offered at the destination.
- Coordination among the wildlife and tourism officials can provide both better and sustainable ecotourism programs on one hand and conservation on the other.
- Service Quality by all the service providers at the destination like accommodation units, transport etc must be enhanced through appropriate training programmes on customer handling ,etiquettes may be imparted to employees at both skilled and semi skilled level.
- The staff must be equipped with knowledge pertaining to ecotourism guidelines and they must be trained for enhancing their communication skills especially in foreign languages which would help them to cater to the requirements of foreign eco tourists.
- Amenities like restrooms, canteens may be provided at ecotourism destinations using green technologies and recycling methods to reduce the adverse impact on environment.
- Education and interpretation component must be emphasised to provide quality ecotourism experience through learning experience.
- Local community interaction and display of indigenous art forms must be encouraged.
- Cheaper accommodation through bed and breakfast businesses, homestays along with local cuisine should be promoted by tourism department.
- Efforts must be made to enhance connectivity, provide better infrastructure at the destination and also enroute to the destination.

- Feedback from tourists must be collected periodically and appropriate measures must be taken from time to time to assess and enhance visitor satisfaction.
- Attractive loyalty programmes like good discounted packages etc must be introduced exclusively for repeat visitors and
- Innovative ecotourism programs must be introduced for children and senior citizens to increase their visitation rates

5.4 Scope for future research:

- A comparative study of ecotourism experience in Periyar tiger reserve with other ecotourism destinations can be formulated;
- A study on linkage between ecotourism experience and tourist loyalty can also be designed and
- A study on community participation in ecotourist destination can also be undertaken.