Evaluating The Role Of Responsible Tourism In Promoting Sustainable Employment: Empirical Evidence From Kerala

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Abstract
This paper explores how responsible tourism affects employment sustainability in Kerala, focusing on ecotourism, organic farming tourism, and community-based tourism. Based on data from 363 tourism-linked units across Kerala, the study uses Ordered Probit and OLS models to analyze key factors influencing job sustainability. Results show that community-based tourism leads to more sustainable employment, while ecotourism lags behind. Individual factors such as education, income, experience, and training significantly improve employment outcomes, while gender disparities remain evident. The study concludes that responsible tourism can foster sustainable livelihoods when supported by community engagement, training, and inclusive policies. It calls for strategic policy action to enhance the positive impact of responsible tourism across all regions of Kerala.
Keywords: Responsible Tourism; Employment Sustainability; Community-Based Tourism; Kerala; Ordered Probit Model

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth and employment generation worldwide. Among the various forms of tourism, responsible tourism has gained prominence as it seeks to minimize negative environmental, social, and economic impacts while enhancing the well-being of host communities. In Kerala, a state renowned for its tourism potential, responsible tourism initiatives such as ecotourism, organic farming tourism, and community-based tourism have been actively promoted in recent years. These initiatives aim to create sustainable livelihood opportunities while preserving local culture and the natural environment.

Despite the growth of responsible tourism in Kerala, the sustainability of employment in tourism-related activities remains an underexplored area. Employment sustainability refers to the ability of jobs to provide long-term, stable, and decent work conditions that contribute to economic security, social well-being, and personal development. It encompasses aspects such as job security, adequate wages, opportunities for skill enhancement, safe working conditions, and social protection. Employment sustainability is crucial to ensuring the long-term socio-economic benefits of tourism and mitigating risks related to job insecurity and workforce vulnerability.

While several studies have addressed the economic and environmental impacts of responsible tourism (Bah, 2008. Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017), the employment dimension has received limited attention, especially with respect to comparative assessments of different responsible tourism forms. Numerous studies have evaluated how ecotourism contributes to environmental conservation and how community-based tourism fosters local economic development (Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017; Spenceley et al. 2002; Cape Town, 2009). However, very few studies have systematically examined the sustainability of employment generated through responsible tourism initiatives. Even fewer have compared different forms of responsible tourism—such as ecotourism, organic farming tourism, and community-based tourism—to evaluate their relative impacts on employment sustainability.

While some research has acknowledged the socio-economic benefits of responsible tourism in Kerala, there is a clear gap in understanding the determinants of employment sustainability within this context. The present study addresses this gap by analyzing how different forms of responsible tourism influence

employment sustainability using empirical data collected from tourism-related activities in Kerala. By conducting a field survey in selected regions in Kerala, this study assesses the effect of responsible tourism on employment sustainability of tourism workers. The contribution of this study lies in its comparative analysis of different forms of responsible tourism and their distinct impacts on employment sustainability. By focusing on Kerala, a prominent destination for responsible tourism initiatives, this research provides insights into how diverse tourism models contribute to or hinder sustainable employment. Given the increasing emphasis on responsible tourism as a tool for sustainable development, the findings of this study are significant for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and local communities.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Responsible tourism has been widely recognized as a sustainable alternative to conventional tourism models, emphasizing ethical practices that benefit both host communities and the environment. According to Smith (1992) and Stanford (2000), responsible tourism involves tourism practices that respect the natural, cultural, and built environment of host communities while balancing the interests of all stakeholders. The Kerala Tourism Policy (2012) further defines responsible tourism as an integrated strategy that combines planning, management, product development, and marketing to produce positive socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impacts.

Leslie (2012) emphasized the behavioral dimension of responsible tourism, framing it as a set of actions and management practices rooted in respect for people and their surroundings. Similarly, DEAT (1996) and Spenceley et al. (2002) recognized responsible tourism as a vehicle for enhancing the quality of life of local communities by improving socio-economic conditions and promoting sustainable natural resource management. In this context, Goodwin (2011) drew a distinction between sustainable and responsible tourism, suggesting that the latter is more action-oriented, focusing on practical responsibilities rather than broad sustainability goals. Mihalic (2016) supported this distinction by noting that responsible tourism prioritizes the implementation of sustainable practices over theoretical frameworks.

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated the socio-economic benefits of responsible tourism, particularly in the areas of job creation, community empowerment, and livelihood development. For instance, Mathew and Sreejesh (2017) reported that Kerala's responsible tourism initiatives have significantly contributed to economic sustainability by empowering local communities and enhancing their participation in tourism activities. Spenceley et al. (2002) similarly documented how responsible tourism supports community-based tourism enterprises (CBTEs), thereby expanding employment opportunities for marginalized groups.

Responsible tourism has also been identified as a pro-poor development strategy. Michot (2010) argued that responsible tourism directly promotes local economic development through job creation, especially for disadvantaged communities. In line with this, Bah (2008) and Greiner (2010) found that responsible tourism creates both direct and indirect employment by fostering local businesses and services. Cape Town's (2009) declaration emphasized the multi-dimensional benefits of responsible tourism—economic, social, cultural, and environmental—which collectively improve community well-being and expand employment opportunities.

At the micro level, tourism development has been shown to positively affect residents' quality of life through improved income and access to services. Studies by Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) and Crotts and Holland (1993) found a positive correlation between tourism growth and increased quality of life among local populations. However, Doxey's (1975) Irritation Index and subsequent studies by Cavus and Tanrisevdi (2003) cautioned that unbalanced tourism development may lead to social tensions if benefits are disproportionately accrued by external stakeholders at the expense of local communities.

Focusing specifically on Kerala, Mathew and Sreejesh (2017) and Mathew et al. (2024) found that responsible tourism initiatives contribute not only to employment but also to enhanced visitor satisfaction, destination image, and repeat visitation. Mathew and Nimmi (2021) further emphasized that these practices contribute to holistic community well-being through economic, social, cultural, and environmental responsibilities. These practices align with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

(GSTC-D, 2013), which establish a link between tourism sustainability and the well-being of local communities.

While existing literature strongly supports the role of responsible tourism in employment generation and community development, there remains limited empirical evidence on how these initiatives translate into employment sustainability—defined as long-term, stable, and decent job opportunities that enhance personal and social well-being. Most studies highlight the benefits of responsible tourism in broad socio-economic terms, but few have systematically examined its impact on employment sustainability at the community level. There is also a dearth of comparative analysis assessing the differential impacts of various forms of responsible tourism—such as ecotourism, organic farming tourism, and community-based tourism—on employment outcomes.

The present study addresses this critical research gap by evaluating the effects of different forms of responsible tourism on employment sustainability in Kerala. Through empirical investigation, this research aims to offer a deeper understanding of how responsible tourism can foster not just employment, but sustainable employment that enhances economic resilience and community well-being.

3. DATA SOURCE

This study is based on primary cross-sectional data collected from 363 tourism-related units operating under responsible tourism initiatives in Kerala, India. The data collection covered three distinct regions—South, Central, and North Kerala—represented by the districts of Trivandrum, Ernakulam, and Calicut, respectively. These districts were randomly selected to provide a geographically and socio-economically diverse sample reflective of the state's responsible tourism landscape.

According to the official portal of Responsible Tourism Kerala, a total of 17,600 registered units operates under various responsible tourism initiatives across the state. Using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the estimated sample size was calculated to be 376 units. However, due to minor non-responses and exclusion of ineligible units, the final valid sample size achieved was 363. To ensure the reliability and representativeness of the sample, systematic random sampling was employed. From the official list of registered units in each selected district, every third unit was chosen after randomly determining a starting point. This process continued until the targeted sample size for each district was nearly attained. The inclusion criteria required units to be actively participating in at least one of the key responsible tourism models such as ecotourism, organic farming tourism, or community-based tourism. The collected data serve as a robust empirical foundation for evaluating the effect of responsible tourism on employment sustainability across different regional contexts in Kerala.

4. ESTIMATION METHODS

To examine the effect of responsible tourism initiatives on the sustainability of employment in Kerala, this study employs two estimation methods: Ordered Probit regression and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. These methods were selected to address both the ordinal nature of the dependent variable and to provide a linear approximation of the relationships between variables. The Ordered Probit model serves as the primary estimation technique, as the dependent variable—perceived employment sustainability—is measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). To assess this, the survey asked respondents: "Do you consider your current job in the tourism sector to be sustainable in the long term, in terms of income stability, job security, working conditions, and opportunities for skill development?" This variable captures the respondent's perception of employment sustainability, reflecting dimensions such as long-term job stability, favorable working conditions, and scope for skill enhancement.

The Ordered Probit model is well-suited for ordinal dependent variables and assumes the existence of a continuous latent variable underlying the observed categories. In this model, the observed ordinal responses are determined by thresholds (cut points) that segment the latent variable. The model estimates the probability of a respondent selecting a higher category of perceived employment sustainability based on variations in the independent variables, which include different forms of responsible tourism as well as control variables such as age, gender, marital status, and education. The OLS model, though secondary, complements the Ordered Probit by offering an interpretable linear relationship, enabling robustness checks and comparisons.

The model can be expressed as follows:

$$Yi^* = \beta 0 + \beta 1 Xi + \beta 2 Ei + \beta 3 Zi + \epsilon i$$

In the Ordered Probit model, the latent variable $Yi*$ represents the underlying perceived employment sustainability for individual i, which is influenced by Types of responsible tourism (Xi), Ei is experience in tourism sector, and a set of control variables denoted as Zi. The coefficient $\beta 1$ represents the effect of responsible tourism on latent variable perceived sustainability of employment, $\beta 2$ is the effect of tourism experience on sustainability of employment, $\beta 3$ tells the effect of control variables on the latent variable, while $\beta 0$ is the constant term. The error term, ϵi, captures the unobserved factors influencing the perception of sustainability of employment for each individual. The latent variable is then mapped to the observed ordinal categories using threshold values, which determine the specific perception level chosen by the respondent.

In addition to the Ordered Probit model, the above function is also estimated using the OLS method to determine the linear relationship between perceived sustainability of employment and the explanatory variables. While OLS is less appropriate for ordinal dependent variables, it is used here to provide a clearer understanding of the magnitude and direction of the relationships in a linear context. OLS regression assumes that the dependent variable is continuous, and the model estimates the average change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in an independent variable.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent and Independent Variables

Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of the descriptive statistics used to examine the impact of responsible tourism on employment sustainability in Kerala. The dependent variable, employment sustainability, captures the respondent's perception of whether their current job in the tourism sector is sustainable in the long term, assessed through a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The average score is 3.456, indicating a generally positive perception of job sustainability, while the standard deviation of 1.312 reflects a considerable range of responses. The minimum and maximum values (1 and 5) confirm the ordinal nature of the variable. The average experience in tourism-related work is 12.81 years (SD = 5.60), with a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 30 years, indicating a substantial depth of industry experience among the participants.

The key explanatory variables of interest represent different forms of responsible tourism, with organic farming tourism set as the reference category. Two alternative forms are included: ecotourism, practiced by 43.8% of respondents (mean = 0.438, SD = 0.497), and community-based tourism, reported by 32.8% (mean = 0.328, SD = 0.470). These variables allow the study to assess how different models of responsible tourism influence perceived employment sustainability.

Several control variables were included to account for demographic and socio-economic differences among respondents. The average age of respondents is 50.66 years (SD = 9.13), with ages ranging from 28 to 70 years, suggesting a mature workforce in the tourism sector. Gender is coded as a binary variable (male = 1), with males constituting 45.2% of the sample. Marital status is also binary (married = 1), with a high proportion of married respondents (87.9%).

Household income, measured in Indian Rupees, averages ₹49,285.12 per month (SD = ₹8,067.01), with values ranging between ₹30,000 and ₹69,000, indicating a moderately well-off economic group. Educational attainment is categorized relative to the base group of respondents with less than SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) education. Among the sample, 27% have completed SSLC, 15.7% have completed Plus Two (higher secondary), 8.3% hold a degree, and 5.5% possess postgraduate qualifications or above.

In terms of vocational background, a significant majority (93.1%) have completed a training certificate relevant to the tourism sector, reflecting a skilled workforce.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics used for the study

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variable				
Employment sustainability (1-5 likert scale)	3.456	1.312	1	5

Variables of interest				
Form of responsible tourism (organic farming tourism=reference category)				
Ecotourism	0.438	0.497	0	1
Community based tourism	0.328	0.470	0	1
Experience in tourism (in years)	12.813	5.596	1	30
Control variables				
Age	50.658	9.125	28	70
Gender (male =1; female =0)	0.452	0.498	0	1
Marital status (married =1; others =0)	0.879	0.327	0	1
Household income	49285.120	8067.009	30000	69000
Education (below SSLC=reference category)				
SSLC	0.270	0.445	0	1
Plus Two	0.157	0.364	0	1
Degree	0.083	0.276	0	1
Pg and above	0.055	0.228	0	1
Training certificate completed (yes=1;no=0)	0.931	0.254	0	1

Source: Estimated from survey data

Results from Regression Analysis

Table 2 shows that different forms of responsible tourism have varying impacts on perceived employment sustainability. Compared to the reference category of organic farming tourism, ecotourism shows a significantly negative association with employment sustainability. The coefficients are -0.728 in the Ordered Probit model and -0.492 in the OLS model, both statistically significant at the 1% level. This indicates that individuals engaged in ecotourism are less likely to perceive their employment as sustainable, possibly due to the seasonal or less community-integrated nature of such activities. In contrast, community-based tourism demonstrates a significantly positive effect on employment sustainability. The coefficients are 0.548 in the Ordered Probit model and 0.349 in the OLS model, again both significant at the 1% level. This suggests that respondents involved in community-based tourism perceive greater employment sustainability, likely reflecting the inclusive, participatory, and locally grounded nature of this tourism model. The findings highlight that not all forms of responsible tourism equally enhance employment outcomes, with community-based tourism offering a more favorable environment for sustainable employment in Kerala's tourism sector.

The tourism experience has a positive and statistically significant impact on the perceived sustainability of employment. In the Ordered Probit model, the coefficient for tourism experience is 0.023, and in the OLS model, it is 0.013, both significant at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. This implies that with each additional year of experience in the tourism sector, individuals are more likely to perceive their employment as sustainable. The positive association suggests that accumulated experience may enhance workers' confidence in job continuity, improve their skills, and increase their adaptability within the responsible tourism framework. It may also reflect a better understanding of tourism operations and greater resilience in dealing with sectoral challenges, thereby reinforcing their perception of employment security.

Age has a positive and statistically significant effect on the perceived sustainability of employment. In the Ordered Probit model, the coefficient for age is 0.020 (significant at the 5% level), and in the OLS model, it is 0.014 (significant at the 1% level). This suggests that as individuals grow older, they tend to perceive their employment in the responsible tourism sector as more sustainable. Older workers may feel more secure in their roles due to accumulated experience, deeper integration into their work environment, and greater familiarity with the sector's demands and opportunities. This could also reflect a generational difference in risk perception, with older individuals valuing stability more and thus reporting higher employment sustainability.

The effect of gender on employment sustainability, as shown in Table 2, is positive and statistically significant, though modest in magnitude. In the Ordered Probit model, the coefficient for gender (male = 1, female = 0) is 0.044, and in the OLS model, it is 0.028, both statistically significant. This indicates that male respondents perceive slightly higher employment sustainability in the responsible tourism sector compared to female respondents. The result may reflect gendered differences in access to opportunities, job roles, or work conditions within the tourism sector, where men might have more stable or higher-paying positions, or face fewer social constraints, contributing to their higher perception of employment sustainability.

The effect of marital status on employment sustainability, as reported in Table 2, is positive but not statistically significant in the Ordered Probit model, while it is positive. Specifically, the coefficient is 0.141 in the Ordered Probit and 0.090 in the OLS model. This suggests that married individuals tend to perceive slightly higher employment sustainability compared to unmarried respondents, possibly due to greater financial responsibilities or a stronger motivation to secure and retain stable employment.

The effect of household income on employment sustainability is positive and statistically significant in both the Ordered Probit and OLS models, as shown in Table 2. Although the coefficient values are very small (0.000), this is expected due to the continuous nature and scale of the income variable. The consistent significance across both models indicates that higher household income is associated with a greater perception of employment sustainability. This implies that individuals from higher-income households may experience better working conditions, more secure jobs, or greater access to resources, all of which can enhance the sustainability of their employment in the tourism sector.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that education has a significant and positive impact on the sustainability of employment, particularly at higher levels of attainment. Individuals with a degree show a strong and statistically significant association with improved employment sustainability in both models, suggesting that possessing a degree enhances perceptions of job stability and long-term prospects in the tourism sector. Similarly, those with postgraduate and above qualifications also exhibit a positive effect (0.283 in Ordered Probit and 0.207 in OLS), though the magnitude is comparatively lower than that for degree holders. In contrast, lower levels of education such as SSLC and Plus Two do not show significant effects, indicating that only higher education substantially contributes to perceived employment sustainability.

The completion of a training certificate has a positive and statistically significant effect on employment sustainability, indicating that individuals who have undergone relevant training are more likely to perceive their employment as sustainable. This suggests that training enhances the skills and competencies needed in responsible tourism, thereby improving job stability and confidence in long-term employment. Although the magnitude of the effect is modest, the statistical significance highlights the value of targeted skill development programs in strengthening sustainable employment outcomes within the tourism sector.

Table 2 reports statistically significant model fit for both estimation methods. The Ordered Probit model shows a Wald chi-square of 43.81, indicating strong joint significance of predictors, while the OLS model reports an F-statistic of 18.56 with an R^2 of 0.34, suggesting a good explanatory power.

Table 2: Estimation of Employment Sustainability – Results from Ordered Probit and OLS Models

	Ordered Probit	OLS
Dependent variable- Employment Sustainability	Coefficient (Robust Std. Error)	Coefficient (Robust Std. Error)
Variable of interest		
1.Form of responsible tourism (organic farming tourism=reference category)		
Ecotourism	-0.728*** (0.258)	-0.492*** (0.161)
Community based tourism	0.548*** (0.281)	0.349*** (0.172)
2.Tourism experience (in years)	0.023 ***(0.023)	0.013** (0.014)
Control variables		

Age	0.020** (0.016)	0.014*** (0.010)
Gender (male =1; female =0)	0.044* (0.197)	0.028** (0.122)
Marital status (married =1; others =0)	0.141* (0.381)	0.090 **(0.213)
Household income	0.000 ***(0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)
Education (below SSLC=reference category)		
SSLC	-0.005 (0.260)	0.006 (0.161)
Plus Two	0.215 (0.355)	0.129 (0.217)
Degree	0.919*** (0.429)	0.601** (0.257)
Pg and above	0.283*** (0.474)	0.207** (0.297)
Training certificate completed (yes=1;no=0)	0.114*** (0.0459)	0.046* (0.275)
Cut Points		
/cut1	-0.191 (1.199)	
/cut2	1.243 (1.191)	
/cut3	2.499 (1.195)	
/cut4	4.001 (1.198)	
Wald chi2(12) /F Test	43.81***	18.56***
Pseudo R2/ R2	0.0374	0.34
Sample size	363	363

6. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the effect of responsible tourism on the sustainability of employment in Kerala, with a particular focus on how different tourism models—ecotourism, organic farming tourism, and community-based tourism—shape the perceived quality and longevity of employment among workers. The study, based on primary data from 363 tourism-related units across Kerala, reveals significant variations in employment sustainability across the three models. While community-based tourism shows a strong and positive association with employment sustainability, ecotourism exhibits a negative effect when compared to the baseline of organic farming tourism. These findings point to the uneven potential of responsible tourism forms to generate secure, long-term, and fulfilling employment opportunities.

The results also indicate that experience in the tourism sector, higher education, and completion of training programmes significantly improve the perception of employment sustainability. Additionally, gender, income, and age show notable effects, suggesting that socio-demographic characteristics intersect with tourism dynamics to shape employment outcomes. While male workers report slightly more sustainable employment than their female counterparts, the influence of household income and accumulated experience suggests that both economic background and work tenure reinforce job security and satisfaction.

The findings of this study hold important implications for policy and practice. First, community-based tourism appears to offer a more inclusive and participatory model that can be scaled up to improve employment sustainability. Its potential lies not only in its economic benefits but also in fostering local ownership, skill development, and community resilience. Second, the relatively negative perception of employment sustainability in ecotourism underscores the need for improved institutional support, capacity building, and consistent income flows in such ventures. Third, government interventions such as skill-based training, educational opportunities, and gender-sensitive employment policies could help bridge gaps in sustainable employment outcomes across demographic groups.

In conclusion, responsible tourism, while conceptually geared toward inclusive development, does not uniformly translate into sustainable employment in practice. The sustainability of tourism-related employment is contingent upon the form of tourism promoted, the socio-economic profile of workers, and the institutional ecosystem that supports tourism development. As Kerala continues to position itself as a model for responsible tourism in India, it must also pay closer attention to employment sustainability as a central pillar of tourism policy. Integrating worker welfare more explicitly into tourism planning can help ensure that the economic and social gains of responsible tourism are both equitable and enduring.

Declaration

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process.

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