

Tourist Profiles and Characteristics vis-à-vis Market Segmentation of Ecotourism Destinations in Kerala

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Abstract

Kerala, a classic ecotourism destination in India, provides significant opportunities for livelihood options to the people who depend on the resources from the forest and those who live in difficult terrains. This article analyses the socio-demographic, psychographic and travel behavior patterns and its sub-characteristics in the background of foreign and domestic tourists. The data source for the article has been obtained from a primary survey of 350 randomly chosen tourists, 175 each from domestic and foreign tourists, visiting Kerala's ecotourists destinations during August-December 2010-11. Several socio-demographic, psychographic and life style factors have been identified based on the inference from field survey. There is considerable divergence in most of the factors identified in the case of domestic and international tourists. Post-trip attributes like satisfaction and intentions to return show that the ecotourism destinations in Kerala have significant potential that can help communities in the region.

Keywords: Tourists, Ecotourism, Socio-demographic, Psychographic, Lifestyle, Motivation, Satisfaction, Revisit

1. Introduction

Kerala, with an area of 38,863 sq.km and 3, 18, 41,374 people, is a small state at the southernmost tip of the country. It comes out as the most acclaimed tourist destination in India. The engraved natural beauty embedded with rich flora, fauna and wilderness bestows Kerala the title "Gods own Country". Within the tourism sector, ecotourism sub-sector is of high currency, encompassing 60 forest destinations and 12 nominated sites and this sub-sector is playing a pivotal role in accelerating the pace of tourism in the state. There are 15 Wild life Sanctuaries and 5 National parks in Kerala covering a geographical area of 5.5 percent of the State (Govt. of Kerala 2007). Ecotourism projects in Kerala, based on the concept of sustainability, play a predominant role in the ecotourism initiative of the state. The recent proclamation of the World Heritage tag to the ecotourism sites of Western Ghats is expected to increase the global attention and visitation to these sites (UNESCO 2012). Out of the 39 adorned serial sites of the Ghats, 12 are from Kerala. This makes Kerala a typical destination for both the domestic and international tourist segments.

According to Valentine (1992), ecotourism is the travel to enjoy the world's amazing diversity of natural life and human culture without causing damages. Main driving force of the ecotourism projects in Kerala is conservation, and poverty alleviation of the local community. Revenue generated from tourism in 2010 was to the tune of Rs. 1,73, 480 million; out of which, the ecotourism sub-sector contributes about 60 percent (Dept. of Tourism 2012). The tourism studies have focused to socio-demographic, psychographic, satisfaction and revisit intentions of tourists. The dependency and interdependency of these variables have not been well researched embedding ecotourism destinations with domestic and international segmentations. The intent of this article is to understand the link between socio-demographic, psychographic and travel behaviour patterns and thereby make a dichotomy into domestic and international tourists visiting the ecotourism destinations focusing on the differences of these characteristics and its dependencies. Post-trip attributes like satisfaction with the destinations and revisit



intentions are evaluated on the basis of tourist perception. This pattern of analysis would help to unravel the tourism linked livelihood options of the outlier communities living in the ecotourism sites.

2. Review of Literature

Motivation to travel and the associated behaviour of tourists are not unique (Krippendorf 1987). The desire to travel and travel decisions are influenced by a host of factors such as socio-demographic, psychographic and travel behaviour patterns, which in turn provides a matrix of information enlightening positive attitudes relating to spending pattern and revisit intentions (Rajasenan and Ajitkumar 2004). Psychographic segmentation is analysed in literature as a useful tool to explore the link between satisfactions and revisit intention (Gountas and Gountas 2001; Cole 1997). Satisfaction acts as a key element in destination marketing (Kasim and Ngowsiri 2011). Tran (2011) views that perceived quality factors influence the intention to revisit as well as to recommend the destination to others. Shin (2009) foresees market segmentation as a powerful marketing tool for identifying target groups which in turn, brings visitor identities. Market can also be segmented using socio-demographic, psychographic and motivation to identify the type of services, products and experiences desired by the tourists, *inter alia* income as a determining force for tour options (Zhang and Marcussen 2007).

3. Methodology

The data source for the study has been obtained from a primary survey of 350 randomly chosen tourists (175 each from domestic and foreign) visiting Kerala's ecotourists destinations during August-December 2010-11. Kruskal-Wallis test is used to identify any significant dependency relation between tourist profiles and the motivation to visit. Factor Analysis helps to identify the significant factors giving rise to tourist's satisfaction. Logistic regression is used to identify the pertinent variables endorsing their willingness to revisit the ecotourism destinations.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-demographic factors

The study tries to analyse the physiographic, socio-demographic, satisfaction and revisit intentions of domestic and international tourists visiting Kerala and its arrival patterns. The socio-demographic profile provides information on age, sex, nationality, educational qualification and income.

Table 1 part (a) shows an apparent dichotomy between the age of the foreign and the domestic tourists visiting ecotourists destinations. It shows that the proportion of visitors below 25 years is 38.2 percent for the international and 10.5 percent for the domestic. Male-female ratio of visitors surveyed also show dissimilar results for domestic and international tourists [Table 1 part (b)]. The international sector illustrates a female dominance in comparison with the domestic sector. Education classification gives interesting inference as most of the visitors, irrespective of domestic or international are either graduates or postgraduates, who visit the ecotourism destinations for academic and study purposes [Table 1 part (c)]. Employment wise, majority of the visitors are either employed or students [Table 1 part (d)]. There is marked disparity in the percentage of employed and student visitors among domestic (8.7 percent) and international (41.6 percent) tourists. Income [Table 1 part (e)], one of the most important socio-demographic characteristics of tourists, demonstrates considerable participation in ecotourism activities across most of the income categories, irrespective of domestic and international segments.

Table 1 (about here)

4.2 Psychographic characteristics

Psychographic characteristics provide an overall picture of the opinions and interests of visitors and it includes purpose of visit, motivation, awareness, satisfaction and revisit intentions. The purpose of visit [Table 2 part (a)] is correlated to leisure, business related activities, visiting friends/relatives, educational purposes and to enjoy unseen destinations. The core purpose of visit is for leisure, as 76.2 percent (domestic) and 74.2 percent (international) have given preference. Five motivation factors (M_1 to M_5) have been identified based on the inference from the field survey (Figure 1) for domestic as well as international tourists.

Table 2 (about here)

But there is no considerable divergence in motivational factors between the domestic and international tourists.



Majority of the domestic tourists stated that they visited Kerala mainly to enhance their awareness about nature, followed by getting a break from busy life, whereas the foreign tourists came to enjoy wilderness and participate in recreational activities.

Table 3 (about here)

Kruskal-Wallis test helps to identify any significant dependency relation between the travel characteristics and motivation to visit. The Chi-square value (Kruskal-Wallis H) is shown in Table 3. There is a statistically significant difference between M_1 - M_2 - M_5 with mean ranks of demographic trait *Nationality*; M_1 - M_2 - M_3 - M_4 - M_5 with *Age group*; M_3 - M_4 with *Sex ratio*; M_3 with *Educational qualification*; M_1 with *Employment status*; and M_5 with *daily expenditure*. Hence, it can be hypothesized that there is no major difference between the motivational factors and the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists visiting the ecotourism destinations.

Source of information is pertinent in tourism parlance for targeting sites and its preference pattern for visits. Table 2 part (b) shows that the internet and magazines (27.9 and 15.1 percent respectively) provide an important information source, whereas the next powerful and reliable medium for domestic tourists is friends and word of mouth (25.6 percent). In the international context, the tourists do not have access to newspapers/television advertisements about Kerala. The majority of respondents have claimed that they referred guidebooks (32 percent), gathered experienced friends' suggestions (30.3 percent) and surfed the internet (29.2 percent) to find ecotourism sites.

Figure 1 (about here)

Satisfaction of visitors is one of the main psychographic factors attached to the potential of an ecotourism destination. Figure 1 gives the multi-level satisfaction of visitors, both domestic and international. It evinces the fact that the visitors have good opinion about the guide's information on natural environment and wildlife, information on local culture, and sustainable tourism.

In order to reveal the satisfaction level of the tourists about the facilities available at the destinations, 18 variables were identified based on literature scan and field experience. To identify the significant factors giving satisfaction to tourists, factor analysis based on principal component extraction method was attempted and the result is given in Table 4. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient 0.849 indicates high reliability, as it exceeds the highly acceptable level of 0.8. The sample adequacy was tested using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and the result, 0.733 is greater than the generally accepted minimum of 0.50 for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed (Burns and Burns 2008). It also shows that the Bartlett's test is significant with high Chi-Square value. The analysis brought out six factors that accounted for 66.16 percent of the total variance from the 18 factors. Component matrix shows that all the variables except equipment support for various activities, friendliness of people, information and service support at the visitor center and food have factor loadings of 0.5 or above for the first component.

Table 4 (about here)

The variables, convenience and access to local transport, shopping, telecommunication, facilities for children and interpretation of local/tribal culture are the biggest contributors to the first factor. From the first four variables, it can be surmised that easy access and basic facilities at the destination are the major factors that shape the tourists' impression about the destination. Among these, factors like telecommunication, facilities for children and interpretation of local/tribal culture should embrace much importance as more than 50 percent tourists visiting these places with families and hence the ecotourism destinations of Kerala hold the potential to be marketed as 'family hideouts'.

The variable sanitation/cleanliness of the place has the major positive loading in the second factor, emphasizing the need to keep the premises of the destinations clean and eco-friendly. The variables- other amenities and safety/security at the destination encompass the diversity/variety of physical activities and equipment support for various activities available (third and fourth factors), points the importance of increasing leisure activities. Most of the factors pertaining to satisfaction/impression of tourists about the overall services and benefits from the ecotourism destinations show a good score. This reveals that Kerala has positioned its ecotourism destinations based on visitor satisfaction and hence highlight the scope for revisit.

Perception quality depends on the level of expectation and satisfaction. The endorsement of quality depends upon its potential, enthusiasm of tour operators, tourism circuit, conservation groups, accessibility, climate, tourism information system and hospitality. These parameters were put in a 7 point scale ranging from very high to very low, and the perception of tourists about these factors was studied (Figure 2). It illustrates that tourists of ecotourism destinations in Kerala endorse positively as these destinations have enthusiastic tour operators, well



developed tourism circuits, active nature conservation groups, easy accessibility, good climate, ample information systems and excellent hospitality.

Figure 2 (about here)

4.3 Travel Behaviour Patterns

Travel behaviour patterns consist of mode of transportation, travel arrangement, preference to travel alone or with group. Table 2 part (c) portrays that 52.90 percent of the domestic tourists prefer to or travel with family, whereas 70.8 percent of the international tourists like to travel with friends and 19.7 percent with spouse. Table 2 part (d) shows that 51.60 percent of the total domestic respondents prefer to travel with family. Group of 3-6 is the preference pattern of international tourists, whereas 7-14 is the preferred groups for the domestic respondents. Table 2 part (e) explains that a major segment of international and domestic tourists claim that they make the travel arrangements independently, i.e., 62.8 percent and 66.9 percent, respectively while the domestic tourists depend on the travel agents.

There is considerable difference with respect to the mode of travel between the domestic and international ecotourists, the international groups use public transportation facility to reach the destination once they arrived in India, but the domestic tourists would like to ride/drive either in a personal or rented car to the ecotourism destinations. In the international sector, 41.6 percent prefer to travel by tour bus, 29.2 percent by prepaid taxis and 20.8 percent prefer to take rented cars [Table 2 part (f)]. Duration of stay [Table 2 part (g)] is the major determinant to gauge the acceptance of any particular destination. In the domestic context, about 43 percent have an opinion to stay for 2 to 4 days, 36 percent prefer to spend a day in any destination. Majority of international tourists (68.5 percent) have a preference to stay 2 to 4 days.

For the purpose of capturing the activities of the tourist's preference in the ecotourism destinations, 11 characteristics are identified and depicted in Table 2 part (h). The domestic tourists' preference in ecotourism activities is high in wildlife viewing (24.1 percent), bird watching (16.2 percent), and visiting national parks (14.7 percent). Whereas, the international tourists prefer wildlife viewing (14.7 percent), visiting villages (15 percent), and cultural heritage sights (10 percent), national parks (16 percent), indigenous populations (10.3 percent) and art/culture (10.7 percent). From this, it is inferred that international tourists are more enthusiastic in participating ecotourism activities, whereas the domestic tourist's interest is in sightseeing.

The livelihood of the dependent community and sustainability of the ecotourism destinations are linked with the expenditure pattern. It consists of transportation, food and beverages, shopping, guide fees, lodging and entry fees to ecotourism destinations. Table 2 part (i) explains the average expenditure of domestic tourists (Rs. 2802) and international tourists (Rs.3766). The total share of the expenditure on food and beverages comes to 29 percent in the case of the domestic and 30 percent for the international tourists. It is evident from Table 2 part (j) that 84.9 percent of domestic and 96.1 percent of international tourists have shown positive attitude towards revisiting the ecotourism destinations. This shows the importance and potentiality of the ecotourism destinations of Kerala. Hence, requisite infrastructure coupled with proper marketing strategy will make Kerala a precious ecotourism destination.

Since revisit is a pertinent factor as far as tourism is concerned, the responses of tourists of their willingness to revisit the ecotourism destinations in Kerala are further analysed using logistic regression. Revisit decision attributes like expenditure, food and accommodation, safety and security, friendliness of people, cleanliness of places, shopping, access and climate are taken into consideration. The calculated exp (B) is the expected effect of the independent variable on the "odds ratio", which is the probability of the event divided by the probability of the non-event and they are in log-odds units and the prediction equation is

log (p/1-p) = b0 + b1*x1 + b2*x2 + b3*x3 + b3*x3+b4*x4+ b5*x5+ b6*x6+ b7*x7+ b8*x8 Where, p is the probability of being in honors composition.

The Hosmer and Lemeshow is a test for the overall fit of the model. Because the p-value (0.27) is higher than the significance level (5%), it is concluded that the model fits the observed dataset. Assuming that the desired significance level is at 0.1, the attributes like food and accommodation, safety and security, friendliness of people, and climate are positively influencing the decision making, whereas cleanliness of places have a negative influence on the decision making (Table 5).



Table 5 (about here)

The fitted logistic regression equation is

log(p/1-p) = .296 - 0.106*Expenditure + 0.943*food and accommodation + 0.876*safety and security + 0.937 *Friendliness of people-1.194*Cleanliness of place + 0.701*Shopping - 0.451*Conveniences and Access + 1.238*Climate.

The overall analysis makes it clear that majority are very much interested to revisit ecotourism destinations. Since any visit to natural area is subject to strict rules and regulations, adhering to carrying capacity guidelines and stringent waste management practices, some of the tourists may fail to accept these legal frameworks and hence will not prefer to visit again to these destinations.

5. Conclusion

Analysis based on ecotourism attributes and its decomposition based on a matrix of variables shows marked divergence between the domestic and international tourists visiting ecotourism destinations of Kerala in most of the factors. Dichotomy between the foreign and the domestic tourists is noticeable with regard to socio-demographic factors like age, employment and gender. The results of the Chi-Square test reveal that there is no considerable discrepancy in the motivational factors identified in the domestic and international tourist segments. The post rip attributes like satisfaction and revisit intentions, irrespective of the domestic and international dichotomy based on Factor Analysis and Logistic Regression show that the ecotourists are very much satisfied and hence interested to revisit the destinations.

The satisfaction of tourists about the overall services and benefits from the ecotourism destinations reveals that Kerala has positioned its ecotourism based on visitor satisfaction. The perception of the ecotourists based on a 7 point scale brings to the fact that the destinations in Kerala have the requisite wherewithal like enough potentialities, high enthusiastic tour operators, well developed tourism circuits, active nature conservation groups, easy accessibility, good climate, ample information systems and excellent hospitality. Positive attitudes regarding revisit on the part of the international tourists in these ecotourism destinations is a clear espousal of the potentiality of the ecotourism destinations of Kerala.

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Table 1 Socio-demographic Profile (%)

Profiles	Chi-Square	Sig.	Domestic	International		
()		0.000	<25	10.5	<25	38.2
			25-35	40.7	25-35	41
	48.245		36-45	27.3	36-45	10.1
(a)Age	48.243		46-55 17.4 46-55		46-55	7.9
			56-65	2.9	56-65	2.2
			>65	1.2	>65	0.6
(h)C	26.775	0.000	Male	68	Male	40.4
(b)Sex	26.775		Female	32	Female	59.6
	33.751	0.000	High school	5.2	high school	0
() 51			Vocational/trade school	4.7	Vocational/trade school	0
(c)Education			College	59.3	College	44.4
			Post-Graduate	30.8	Post-Graduate	55.6
(d)Employment	53.395	0.000	Employed	81.4	Employed	54.5
			Unemployed	8.7	Unemployed	2.2
			Student	8.7	Student	41.6
			Retired	1.2	Retired	1.7
(e)Income	2.894E2	0.000	0*	16.3	0*	18.5
			<1,00,000	6.4	<10,00,000	31.5
			1,00,001-5,00,000	58.7	10,00,001-20,00,000	21.3
			5,00,001-10,00,000	14.5	20,00,001-30,00,000	20.2
			>10,00,001	4.1	>30,00,001	8.4

^{*}Students, aged citizens, unemployed housewives



Table 2 Psychographic profiles and travel behaviour patterns

		1		International			-		Domestic	International
gı	Leisure		76.2	74.2	2 ave		Personal/Rented Car		52.3	20.8
Business			5.2	1.7	of tr	То	our Bus/Vehic	ele	27.3	41.6
of v	Business Visiting friends & relatives Education Volunteerism Other		8.1	1.1	f)Mode of trave	Ta	ıxi		20.3	29.2
ose	Education		0	4.5	(f)M	Ot	ther		0	8.4
Purp	Volunteerism		2.3	5.6	n (1	1		36	18.5
(a)	Other		8.1	12.9	ratio	2-	4		43	68.5
	Guide book		4.1	32	g)Duration	5-	5-10		18.6	9.6
	Television		8.1	0	ਰੇ)	10	10 above		2.3	3.4
SSS	Newspaper		9.3	0		Hi	Hiking/trekking		9.1	5.2
(b)Awareness	Magazine		15.1	1.1		W	Wildlife viewing		24.1	14.7
Awa	Internet		27.9	29.2		Bi	Biking		-	0.3
9	Travel Brochure		6.4	5.1		Cl	Climbing		6.5	3.2
	Travel agency/Tour of	perator	3.5	2.2	,,	Sv	Swimming		4.7	6.3
	Friends/word of mout	h	25.6	30.3	rities	Vi	Visiting Villages		7.5	15
	Alone		2.3	1.1	(h)Activities	Bi	Bird watching		16.2	8.3
vel	ਤੂ as a couple		19.8	19.7	(h)/	Сι	Cultural heritage sights		8.6	10
(c)Travel	with friends		25	70.8		Vi	siting Nation	al Parks	14.7	16
(3)	with family		52.9	8.4		po	siting	indigenous	3.5	10.3
	1		2.3	1.1		Aı	rt and ogrammes	Cultural	5.2	10.7
(d)Members	S 2 2		23.3	21.3	e	+	Transport		612.78	797.78
Леш	3-6		33.1	37.1	ditu	-	Food/ beverage		819.44	1142.5
(p)	e 7-14		37.2	40.4	xpen	Souvenir		191.67	266.94	
	15 above		4.1	0	ty E	Shopping Guide Lodging			287.78	316.11
S			62.8	66.9	(i)Average per day Expenditure			116.39	147.78	
our nent	Travel agent/tour operator		33.7	14	ge p			570.83	890.56	
(e)Tour arrangements	Other Other		3.5			Others		203.33	204.72	
(апта	arrs					Total		2802.22	3766.39	
a) b)		b)	c)	d)	e)	-	f)	g)	h)	i)
Cl	hi-Square 24.669	91.338	95.86	50 33.222	33.1	60	46.376	25.504	12.399	
Sig	nificance 0.000	0.000	0.00	0.002	0.0	000	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.001



Table 3 Kruskal-Wallis-Test (Motivation to visit)

		$\mathbf{M_1}$	\mathbf{M}_{2}	M_3	M_4	M_5
		Increase in	Getting	Enjoy	Participate	Provide
		awareness	Chance	wilderness	in	tourism
		about	from	/undisturb	recreational	benefits to
Travel Characteristics		Nature	Busy Life	ed areas	activities	locals
	Chi-Square	5.487	5.199	2.333	1.074	8.233
Nationality	Sig.	0.019	0.023	0.127	0.300	0.004
	Chi-Square	14.05	34.782	32.13	38.855	17.945
Age-Group	Sig.	0.015	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003
	Chi-Square	2.833	1.867	4.917	8.513	0.829
Sex-ratio	Sig.	0.092	0.172	0.027	0.004	0.363
	Chi-Square	6.324	1.22	8.341	4.955	4.188
Education	Sig.	0.097	0.748	0.039	0.175	0.242
	Chi-Square	14.652	4.132	7.27	5.055	6.458
Employment	Sig.	0.002	0.248	0.064	0.168	0.091
	Chi-Square	4.176	0.791	8.604	7.623	10.467
Daily-Expenditure	Sig.	0.383	0.940	0.072	0.106	0.033



Table 4 Component Matrix^a

Table 4 Component Matrix								
	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Convenience and access to local								
transport	0.734	0.132	-0.234	-0.207	-0.175	0.010		
Shopping opportunities	0.693	0.212	-0.111	-0.357	0.117	-0.301		
Telecommunications	0.693	-0.060	0.026	-0.250	-0.004	0.472		
Facilities to children	0.689	-0.027	0.231	0.060	-0.082	0.169		
Interpretation of local/tribal culture								
programmes	0.644	-0.313	-0.181	-0.116	0.015	-0.127		
Diversity/variety of physical activities	0.540	-0.238	-0.040	0.465	-0.275	0.015		
Helpful police services	0.513	0.342	0.396	-0.164	-0.203	-0.246		
Interpretation of wildlife/plant life	0.500	0.310	-0.466	-0.071	-0.010	0.287		
Equipment support for various activities	0.495	0.062	-0.125	0.482	-0.053	-0.115		
Friendliness of the people	0.479	0.317	-0.320	0.152	0.092	-0.109		
Sanitation/cleanliness of the place	0.365	0.593	-0.064	0.124	0.299	0.377		
Food	0.468	-0.569	-0.146	0.169	0.331	-0.130		
Other amenities provided	0.523	-0.193	0.537	-0.074	-0.143	0.195		
Safety and security	0.384	-0.219	0.519	-0.146	0.330	0.217		
Staffs' language skills	0.363	0.202	0.286	0.552	-0.287	-0.010		
Information and service support at the								
visitor centers	0.408	-0.407	-0.273	-0.284	-0.522	-0.068		
Lodging	0.451	-0.372	-0.145	0.188	0.469	0.002		
Availability of local handicrafts	0.533	0.244	0.261	-0.069	0.239	-0.577		

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy= 0.733

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-Square=2.055E3, Sig=.000

Reliability Statistics-Cronbach's Alpha=.849

Table 5 Accepting the destination for Revisit

Variables in the Equation									
Attributes	В	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)			
Expenditure	106	.411	.066	1	.797	.900			
Food and Accommodation	.943	.493	3.665	1	.056	2.568			
Safety and Security	.876	.437	4.015	1	.045	2.401			
Friendliness of people	.937	.522	3.224	1	.073	2.553			
Cleanliness of places	-1.194	.632	3.573	1	.059	.303			
Shopping	.701	.476	2.170	1	.141	2.016			
Conveniences and access	451	.537	.706	1	.401	.637			
Climate	1.238	.496	6.228	1	.013	3.447			
Constant	.296	.867	.116	1	.733	1.344			

Model summary:-2 Log likelihood=185.405, Cox & Snell R²=0.091, Nagelkerke R²=0.195;Hosmer and Lemeshow Test: Sig=0.270, Chi-square=9.936



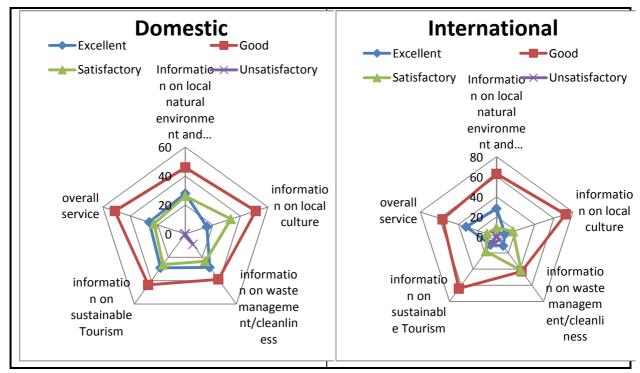


Figure 1 Guide Service and level of Satisfaction

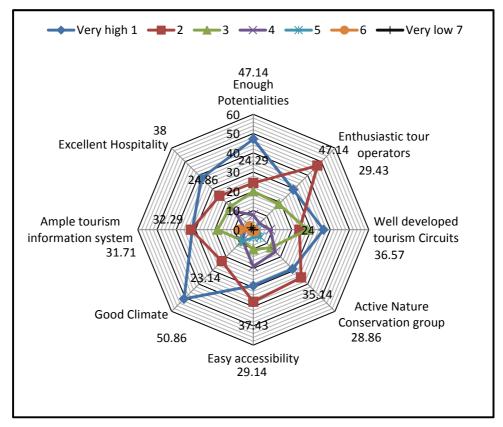


Figure 2 Tourist perception about Kerala as an ecotourism Destination (%)

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