

A Study on Economic Prospects and Challenges of Tourism Industry in Lakshadweep Islands

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ABSTRACT

The paper discussed the economic prospects and challenges of sustainable tourism in Lakshadweep islands. Lakshadweep is the only coral atolls in India. Agatti, Amini, Andrott, Bangaram, Bitra, Chetlat, Kadmat, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kiltan and Minicoy are major islands. Bangaram, Agatti, Kadmath, Minicoy, Kalpeni, and Kavaratti are popular tourist destinations. Yachting, sportfishing, night sea voyages, scuba diving, water skiing, canoeing, kayaking, surfing, snorkelling and wind surfing are the major water sports activities. The vast expanses of the shallow lagoons are perfect for water sports enthusiasts. The Dolphin Dive Centre and Ujra mosque are the major tourist attractions. Wind surfers, Kayaks and ailing boats are available on hire. Tourism sector is a growing sector in Lakshadweep. It has contributed in the economy of the islands. There are prospects of marine tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. There are many challenges before the tourism industry. Therefore, government should implement proper tourism policy for expansion of the tourism industry balancing with the environment of the islands.

Key words : Accommodation, Hospitality, Income, Tourism, and Travellers.

Introduction

Tourism is a social, economic and cultural phenomenon that requires movement of people from their home places for personal, business or recreational purposes. It is a temporary or short-term movement. Travellers cannot stay more than one consecutive year for business, leisure, and other purposes. Thomas Cook is known as the Father of tourism. Heterogeneity, seasonality, intangibility, inter dependence and perish ability are the basic features of tourism. It included both domestic and international travelling. Tourism sector brings many benefits for the nation, such as employment creation, unification of various societies, economic growth, culturally sensi-

tive, geographic identity, and preservation and protection of nature.

Tourism resources is key part of tourism industry. It defines services, infrastructure, natural and man-made charms that contribute for creation of tourism places. Customization, content, community, cuisine and culture are the 5 C's of luxury travel. Safari travelling is a main part of wildlife tourism. Big 5 is an amazing experience in safari travelling. They are rhinoceros, leopard, Cape Buffalo, African elephant and lion. Tourism is useful for empowering local communities and development of the region. There are also negative effects due to rapid growth of tourism sector. Some of them are water pollution, deforestation, wildlife destruction and

environmental damage.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to study the economic prospects and challenges of sustainable tourism in Lakshadweep. The subjective objectives of the paper are: (a) to study the trends of tourist arrivals in Lakshadweep; (b) to examine the economic prospects of tourism industry in Lakshadweep; (c) to evaluate challenges before tourism industry in Lakshadweep.

The Study Area

Lakshadweep is categorised as union territory of India. It is an island group of 36 islands but only 10 islands are inhabited. It is divided into three groups: Amindivi Islands in the north, Laccadive Islands in the middle and atoll of Minicoy to the south. It is sandwiched between Laccadive Sea to the east and Arabian Sea to the west. The total size of all the islands are 32.62 km². It is divided into five community development blocks, namely Kiltan, Minicoy, Andrott, Amini and Kavaratti. It has three subdivisions, one district and 10 village panchayats. Accordingly, 2011 census, total population of 10 inhabited islands are 64,473 and population density is 1,976/km². The coastal line of the islands is 132 kilometers. Kavaratti is capital and Andrott is largest capital. English and Malayalam are the official languages. Accordingly, 2011 census, literacy and sex ratio are respectively 91.85 percent and 947.

Materials and Methods

Design and Approach: This study is descriptive in design and has utilized qualitative approach. Secondary data for the study has been collected from various govt. reports, Lakshadweep Island tourism website, report of international agencies, research papers, published or unpublished thesis's, articles, etc.

Method of Analysis: To reveal the tourism practices in general and the future prospects in particular, method of qualitative analysis comprising of descriptive analysis, content and text analysis have been performed.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no impact of corona pandemic on tourist arrivals in Lakshadweep Islands.

H_{1a}: There is impact of corona pandemic on tourist arrivals in Lakshadweep Islands.

Results and Discussion

The economy of the islands depends on agriculture and fishery. As there is shortage of actual arable land, coconut products and fishes are the major exporting products. Fishery is a major industry due to the exclusive economic zone and vast lagoon areas. Yellowfin tuna and skipjack tuna are major commercial varieties fished. Tourist industry was started by opening of Bangaram atoll in 1974 for the international tourism. Travellers can involve in water sports activities due to the coral reefs and marine fauna. Yachting, sportfishing, night sea voyages, scuba diving, water skiing, canoeing, kayaking, surfing, snorkelling and wind surfing are the major water sports activities. Although domestic tourist needs permission to visit the central islands, but foreign tourist is exempted from such permission.

Table 1 discussed religion and languages in Lakshadweep. Islam and Malayalam are respectively the major religion and language of the islands. Lakshadweep is the only coral atolls in India. Agatti, Amini, Andrott, Bangaram, Bitra, Chetlat, Kadmat, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kiltan and Minicoy are the major islands. Bangaram, Agatti, Kadmath, Minicoy, Kalpeni and Kavaratti are the popular tourist destinations. Bangaram is a tiny island. It is an uninhabited island and well connect with Agatti by boat and helicopter transfer. It is very near to Kavaratti and Agatti. The nearest airport is located in Agatti Island. Paraliv and Thinnakara islands are close to Bangaram. Travellers enjoy bluish glow to the beach due to phosphorescent plankton washed ashore on the coral sands. Resorts of the islands are popular among the tourists. Agatti island have the only airport in Lakshadweep and connected with Kochi airport. It is a beautiful lagoon in Lakshadweep. Tourist complex facilities are available in the island.

Kadmath is ideal for water sports. Sand banks and sandy beaches are the main tourist attractions.

Table 1. Religion and Languages in Lakshadweep Islands

Religion	Percent	Languages	Percent
Islam	96.58%	Malayalam (Jeseri)	84.17%
Hinduism	2.77%	Dhivehi (Mahl)	14.44%
Christianity	0.49%	Others	1.39%

Source: Census of India (2011).

Glass-bottomed boats, skiing boats, pedal boats, and Kayaks, sailing boats are available for travellers. It has beautiful dive centers. It is an unmatched dive place for scuba divers due to visibility of varieties of fishes in clear water, such as sharks and rays. Minicoy lies about 200 kilometers south of the northern group. It is different from the northern group of islands due to its dress, language, and culture. It is also famous for traditional dance Lava. Colourful race boats called "Jahadhoni" is the another attraction. It is the vital centre of tuna fishing and tuna-canning. Tourist cottages, tourist home, change rooms and facilities for water sports are also available.

Kalpeni along with uninhabited island of Cheriya in the north and two small islands of Tilakkam and Pitti form a single atoll. Huge storm bank of coral debris is situated along the south eastern and eastern shorelines. Travellers can snorkel, swim and reef-walk in vast lagoon. They also involve in water sports on pedal boats, sailboats and kayaks. Koomel Beach have the bathing huts with change rooms facilities. Kavaratti is the most developed island. It has fifty-two mosques. The calm and beautiful lagoon are perfect for snorkelling, swimming and water sports. The Dolphin Dive Centre and Ujra mosque are major tourist attractions. Wind surfers, Kayaks and sailing boats are available on hire.

Table 2 discussed year-wise arrivals of tourists in Lakshadweep. It has observed that the number of tourist visits had been on rise since 2008 and declined after 2019 due to the corona pandemic. Domestic tourist arrival was more than 10 thousand in

2018, which dropped to 6985 in 2020, and was reached 3462 in 2021. On the other hand, foreign tourist arrivals were 820 in 2019, and it was only four in 2021. Lockdowns and travelling restriction, due to the corona pandemic are the main factors behind the sudden drop of the tourist arrivals. Therefore, the null hypothesis-1 is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted, i.e. there is impact of corona pandemic on tourist arrivals in Lakshadweep Islands.

The vast expanses of the shallow lagoons are perfect for water sports enthusiasts' in Lakshadweep. Water sports facilities are available in unpolluted lagoons. Bangaram, Kavaratti and Kadmat have scuba diving facilities. Sharks, Triveli, Yellow Fin Tuna, Sail Fish, and Barracuda are abundant in seas around islands. Kavaratti is capital of Lakshadweep is situated 360 kilometres far away from the coast of the State of Kerala. It is popular among the tourist due to calm lagoons and pristine white sand beaches. Under the Prime Minister of India's Smart Cities Mission, it is chosen for as smart city. Kavaratti island is 1.6 kilometres width and 5.6 kilometres long. Shallow lagoon and coconut palms are situated respectively in western and northern side of the island.

Accordingly, the census of 2011, population of the capital is 11,210 and density of population is 2,920/km². Total area of Kavaratti island is 3.93 km². It is a beautiful town and life is calm and peaceful. Number of vehicles are very less and air is fresh. Mahls and Malayali are the ethnic groups. Tourism is primary industries in island. Its calm lagoons are ideal for swimming and water sports. Sailing boats,

Table 2. Domestic and Foreign Tourist arrivals in Lakshadweep Islands

Year	Tourist		% Share		Rank	
	Domestic	Foreign	DTV	FTV	DTV	FTV
2008	1571	1699	0.00	0.00	35	31
2011	9424	567	0.00	0.00	35	35
2012	4417	580	0.00	0.00	35	35
2013	4784	371	0.00	0.00	35	35
2014	7315	514	0.00	0.00	36	36
2015	17241	1173	0.00	0.00	36	35
2016	8716	753	0.00	0.00	36	36
2017	6620	1027	0.00	0.00	36	36
2018	10435	1313	0.00	0.00	36	35
2019	6985	820	0.00	0.00	37	37
2020	3462	413	0.00	0.01	37	35
2021	13500	4	0.00	0.00	37	37

Source: India Tourism Statistics, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Table 3. SWOT Analysis of Lakshadweep Tourism

Strengths	Weakness
Beautiful tourist's places	Lack of maintenance
Rich in art and culture	Lack of funds.
Welcoming People	Lack of information channels
Lagoons and beaches.	Lack of infrastructure
Marine life	Insufficient transport facilities
Opportunities	Threats
Rich in culture	Shortage of basic commodities
Marine Tourism.	Competition with other states
New Tourism Products and Innovations.	Environmental threats

wind surfers and Kayaks are available for travellers. Fisheries and agriculture are the other major industries. It is rich in diverse marine life. It has tropical savanna climate. It has aquarium, mosques, bank and administrative buildings. Agatti airport is the nearest airport. Non vegetarian food and spiced coconut-rich vegetarian are major cuisine. Alcohol is strictly prohibited. October to March is best time to visit Kavaratti. Paradise hut resort is popular among the tourists.

Tourism sector is a growing sector in Lakshadweep. It has contributed in economy of the islands. There are prospects of marine tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. There are many challenges before the tourism industry. Although Lakshadweep and Maldives are the coral islands and socio-graphical similarity exist, but the basic difference are infrastructure. Maldives have far better tourism infrastructure. There is only one airport in Lakshadweep and mainly connects with the cities of Kerala. Airport is not so developed and isolated from the major tourist islands. There is shortage of accommodation facilities in terms of numbers and quality. There is shortage of drinking water and rain water harvesting system is common in the houses. There are also transportation challenges and limited medical facilities. There are higher price and shortage of essential commodities due to import from the mainland. It is located in cyclone-prone region and threats to infrastructure and livelihoods. For discussing the current overview of tourism sector of Lakshadweep, we have done the SWOT analysis (Table 3).

Conclusion

Tourism sector is a growing sector in Lakshadweep. It has contributed in economy of the islands. There

are more prospects of marine tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. Yellowfin tuna and skipjack tuna are major commercial varieties fished. Travellers can involve in water sports activities due to the coral reefs and marine fauna. Yachting, sport fishing, night sea voyages, scuba diving, water skiing, canoeing, kayaking, surfing, snorkelling and wind surfing are major water sports activities. The vast expanses of the shallow lagoons are perfect for water sports enthusiasts.

There are challenges before the tourism industry. Tourism infrastructure is not adequate for absorbing more travellers. There is shortage of tourist cottages, tourist home, change rooms and facilities of water sports. Transport facilities are also inadequate. Although there is an airport but mainly connected with Kochi and other cities of Kerala. Fresh drinking water and hotel accommodation are the another challenges. Travelling restrictions on travellers are also an additional problem. There is more possibility that excess arrival of tourist will also threat the natural ecosystems of the islands. As the public investment is not adequate, so the Government should encourage more private investment. Therefore, there should a proper tourism policy for development of the tourism industry without hampering the ecosystem in Lakshadweep.

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