

# Problems And Prospects Of Backwater Tourism In Kerala With Special Reference To Alappuzha District

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## ABSTRACT

The desire to travel in order to see new sights, to gain new experiences, and to live under different environments will always grow. This means that the demand for travel and tourism products will grow, and it can be marketed. The backwaters of Kerala are formed by 40 rivers that flow into the Arabian Sea from the Western Ghats. They are used for the transportation of people and products between villages as well as towns. Today, they play a new role; the backwater tourism is one of the most important tourist products of Kerala. Cruising along the backwaters of Kerala in a houseboat is an enchanting experience for the tourists. In the whole world, similar type of tourism can be experienced in Netherlands only. This paper analyses the marketing activities, the various problems faced by tourism service providers and the perception of tourists towards backwater tourism in Kerala with the help of primary data. The analysis by using Garrett's ranking shows that parking of boats, unhealthy competition and lack of Government support were the first three main problems faced by the houseboat operators. Tourist's satisfaction with the main elements of tourism products was measured by using Likert's five point rating scale. A majority of the tourists were satisfied with backwater tourism and were dissatisfied with the lack of cleanliness of backwaters and hygiene factors.

**Keywords :** Backwater Tourism, Tourist Perception, Houseboats, Domestic Tourists, Foreign Tourists, *Kettuvallom*

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## INTRODUCTION

Curiosity and the spirit of adventure are inherent in human beings. The desire to travel in order to see new sights and new experiences and live under different environments will always grow. This means that the demand for travel and tourism products will grow and travel and tourism can be marketed.

❖ **Backwaters and Network of Canals :** The backwaters of Kerala are formed by 40 rivers that flow into the Arabian Sea from the Western Ghats. The backwaters are an integral part of the people of Kerala both in terms of economy as well as lifestyle. They are used for transportation of people and products between villages as well as towns. Today, they play a new role; backwater tourism is one of the most important tourist products of Kerala.

❖ **Houseboats :** Kettuvallom is a country boat that was used in the early days for the transport of goods from the isolated interior villages to the towns. With the advent of roads, bridges and ferry services, gradually, the Kettuvalloms went off the scene. Now, these Kettuvalloms are back again as a major tourist attraction in the form of Houseboats.

A houseboat is a boat with luxurious accommodation facility. Houseboats consist of 1 to 10 bedrooms; commonly available houseboats consist of two bedrooms. A ride on a houseboat is a fabulous way to explore the fascinating beauty of the backwaters of Kerala. A houseboat is about 67 to 100 feet in length and has a width of around 13 feet in the middle. In Alappuzha district itself, 586 houseboats are operated by 172 boat operators.

❖ **Backwater Tourism :** The largest backwater stretch in Kerala is the Vembanad Lake which flows through Alappuzha and Kottayam districts and opens out into the sea at the Kochi port. The Ashtamudi Lake, which converts a major portion of Kollam district in the south is the second largest. Cruising through the backwaters in a houseboat or any other boat is termed as backwater tourism.

Cruising along the backwaters of Kerala in a houseboat is an enchanting experience for the tourists - it is a gateway for the visitor to see firsthand, the unhurried village and village life of rural Kerala. Alappuzha possesses 40 per cent of the total backwater stretch of Kerala, and the state's houseboat industry is based in Alappuzha district. Unlike beach tourism, which is confined to one particular location, backwater tourism offers a ride on houseboats through various places along with luxurious accommodation and food.

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## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vijayakumar (2000) conducted a study on “Backwater Tourism in Kollam District”. The study focused on the availability of facilities for tourists in backwater regions of Kollam District and identified the attitude of the tourists. He identified the need for proper marketing of the tourist attractions to attract more tourists and also emphasized on the requirement of cleanliness.

Vishnu (2003, p.3) in his newspaper article “Marketing of Backwaters” analyzed the importance of marketing the backwaters. He identified that leveraging tourism is the crowning achievement of Kerala, and packaging the backwaters is the jewel in the crown. The article also revealed that the best of Kerala's offering for tourists is Ayurveda, Beaches and Canal Cruise.

Rao (2007) conducted a study on “Tourist's Perceptions Towards Package Tours”. The study revealed that the propensity to pleasure and time saving transport system have been found to be the most important motivators of tourism followed by leisure and increase in income. The tourists' perceptions towards package tours have a significant relationship with their age, sex and occupation, but social status did not affect their choice.

Sadeh, Asgari, Mousavi, and Sadeh (2012) in their paper “Factors Affecting Tourist Satisfaction and Its Consequences” identified image of the destination, tourists' expectations, and perceived value to be the influential factors on satisfaction. Furthermore, the study found that satisfaction decreases the tourist's complaints which finally end in loyalty.

Issac and Kuriakose (2012) in their study “A Study to Analyze the Satisfaction Level of Tourists Relating to Facility Available in the Backwater Tourism in Alleppey” revealed that most of the tourists - both domestic as well as international - were satisfied with the facilities and the food provided in the houseboats. There is an immediate need to infuse tourism awareness in the society to ensure a positive interaction between hosts and guests, which will encourage tourism entrepreneurship.

Ahammed (2012) in his paper “Major Quality Determinants of Tour Packages in Kerala: A Case Study of Kerala Tourism Development Corporation” identified that there is a significant difference between the satisfaction level of domestic and foreign tourists. He found that attractions, facilities, comfort and transportation, price and communication are the major quality and satisfaction determinants of the tour packages.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To study the nature and marketing activities of boat operators in Alappuzha.
- 2) To study the perception of tourists towards backwater tourism.
- 3) To study the problems faced by houseboat operators in Alappuzha.
- 4) To study the satisfactory level of tourists with backwater tourism.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The advent of backwater tourism in Kerala in the late 1980s led to exponential growth of the houseboat industry and facilitated in attracting a large number of tourists to Alappuzha, Kerala. Now, backwater tourism is one of the most sought after tourist attractions in India. The important advantage of backwaters and canals in Alappuzha is that they are large in size and are navigable as the average breadth of the backwaters is 3.1 km. Another peculiar feature is that the water is in level with the land; this gives an advantage to the tourist as he/she can get a close look at the village and scenic attractions of Kerala while cruising through the backwaters. Of all the places in the world, similar type of tourism can be experienced in Netherlands only.

Though backwater tourism is the most renowned tourism attraction in Kerala, the tourism industry is facing several problems for its survival. Planned development of the houseboat industry and development of infrastructural facilities in backwater regions of Kerala is highly essential to make use of this golden opportunity. The tourism industry is an intensively people-oriented industry. It is the best in the world trade and also the largest export earner. Therefore, tourism services are to be marketed effectively; problems faced by the tourists and their satisfaction level are to be ascertained appropriately, and subsequent steps need to be taken to explore further opportunities.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from the tourists, tourism service providers by using separate schedules. The secondary data was collected from the official publications of the tourism department, district tourism promotional council magazines, journals, newspapers and various websites.

### STATISTICAL TOOLS USED

❖ **Garrett Ranking** : Under this technique, the merits assignment by the respondents were converted into scores. This method was suggested by Garrett for converting the ranks into scores when the number of items ranked differs from respondent to respondent. The percent position for each rank was found using the following formula :

$$\text{Percent Position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_{ij}}$$

Where,

$R_{ij}$  = Rank given to  $i^{\text{th}}$  factor by  $j^{\text{th}}$  individual

$N_{ij}$  = Number of factors ranked by  $j^{\text{th}}$  individual

By referring to the table given by Garrett, the percent position estimated was converted into scores. Then, for each factor, the scores of various respondents were added and were divided by the number of respondents to arrive at the mean score. The mean scores thus obtained for each factor were arranged in the descending order. The factor with the highest mean score was given the first rank, followed by the second, the third and so on.

❖ **Likert's Five Point Rating Scale** : Tourism products are the sum total of tourist attractions, transportation, accommodation, entertainment and all other services, which hopefully result in consumer satisfaction. The major satisfaction determinants which were considered for measuring tourists' satisfaction are as follows :

**1) Attractions ; 2) Accommodation ; 3) Transportation ; 4) Food and Drinks ; 5) Infrastructure Facilities ; 6) Availability of Information ; 7) Currency Exchange ; 8) Shopping Facilities ; 9) Cleanliness and Hygiene factors ; 10) Entertainment Facilities ; 11) Guide Services ; 12) Medical Facility ; 13) Police Services ; 14) Climatic Conditions.**

These fourteen important satisfaction determinants were measured with the help of Likert's Five Point Rating Scale Technique ranking from 5 to 1, depending on the importance given to each variable. Highly satisfied was ranked 5, followed by Satisfied with 4, Average with 3, Dissatisfied with 2 and Highly dissatisfied with 1. The satisfaction of each group was measured by using the following formula :

$$\text{Actual Score} = \frac{\text{Total Weighted Score} \times 100}{\text{Maximum Score}}$$

The standard scores for measuring the level of satisfaction are presented in the Table 1 below :

| Table 1 : Scores for Satisfaction |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Satisfaction Group                | Standard scores of satisfaction |
| Highly Satisfied                  | 66 and above                    |
| Satisfied                         | 51 to 65                        |
| Average                           | 31 to 50                        |
| Dissatisfied                      | 16 to 30                        |
| Highly Dissatisfied               | 15 and above                    |
| Source : Secondary Data           |                                 |

❖ **Sampling** : For the purpose of the study, 185 domestic and 125 foreign tourists were selected from Alappuzha district by using the convenience sampling method in the month of April 2012. For the purpose of collecting data from the services providers, 40 tourism services providers were selected by using the random sampling technique.

❖ **Period of the Study :** The present study is mainly based on primary data. The data from tourists and tourism service providers was collected in the month of June 2012.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data analysis and discussion of finding is presented in four headings.

### 1) NATURE AND MARKETING ACTIVITIES OF THE BOAT OPERATORS

❖ **Boating Through The Backwaters :** In Backwater cruise, the main boating attraction are houseboats, apart from these, the tourists can also enjoy motor boats, shinkari boats, speed boats, raw boats and water skating. The District Tourism Promotional Council is the only agency providing daily backwater trip in a particular route for a fixed rate. The details of the tariff rates of different types of boats, except houseboats, is provided in the Table 2.

| Table 2 : Tariff Rates for Boating |                |                |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Sl.No                              | Types of boats | Rates per Hour |
| 1.                                 | Motor boat     | ₹ 250 to 750   |
| 2.                                 | Raw boats      | ₹ 150 to 400   |
| 3.                                 | Speed boats    | ₹ 800 to 1000  |
| 4.                                 | Water skating  | ₹ 300 to 600   |
| 5.                                 | Shinkari boat  | ₹ 400 to 500   |
| Source: Primary Data               |                |                |

The Table 2 shows that motor boats are available in Alappuzha for ₹ 250 to ₹ 750, raw boats are available at the rate of ₹ 150 to ₹ 400. Speed boats, water skating and shinkari boats are available at ₹ 800 to ₹ 1000, ₹ 300 to ₹ 600 and ₹ 400 to ₹ 600 respectively.

❖ **Tariff Rates For Houseboats :** House boating is an attractive tourism activity to explore the scenic beauty of Kerala. These types of houseboats or traditional Kettuvalloms are not available anywhere else in the world. The tariff rates of a houseboat for one day during the 1990s was around ₹ 40,000 but since the past five years, the number of houseboats have increased considerably, and the rates were reduced due to competition among the houseboats. The tariff rates are highly competitive, and are offered on the basis of the facilities provided. The tariff rates of single and double bedded houseboats are given in the Table 3.

| Table 3 : Tariff Rates for Houseboats |                |          |                   |          |                |           |                   |          |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|
| Types of House boats                  | Single Bedroom |          |                   |          | Double Bedroom |           |                   |          |
|                                       | Season (In ₹)  |          | Off-Season (In ₹) |          | Season (In ₹)  |           | Off-Season (In ₹) |          |
|                                       | Day Cruise     | Full Day | Day Cruise        | Full Day | Day Cruise     | Full Day  | Day Cruise        | Full Day |
| A/C                                   | 5500 to        | 6500 to  | 4500 to           | 5500 to  | 8000 to        | 10,000 to | 5500 to           | 7000 to  |
|                                       | 12,000         | 14500    | 8500              | 9000     | 18000          | 22000     | 10,000            | 14000    |
| Non A/C                               | 4500 to        | 4600 to  | 4000 to           | 4500 to  | 6000 to        | 7000 to   | 4000              | 6000 to  |
|                                       | 8000           | 10,000   | 7000              | 8000     | 12000          | 13500     | 8000              | 8500     |
| Source: Primary Data                  |                |          |                   |          |                |           |                   |          |

The Table 3 shows that a non A/C single bedroom houseboat is available in the off-season at the rate of ₹ 4000 to ₹ 7000 for the day's cruise and ₹ 4500 to ₹ 8000 for a full day and night cruise. During the season, the tariff is ₹ 4500 to ₹ 8000 for the day's cruise and ₹ 5000 to ₹ 10000 for a full day and night cruise. An air conditioned single bedroom houseboat is available in the off season for ₹ 4500 to ₹ 8500 for the day's cruise and for ₹ 5500 to ₹ 9000 for a full day and night cruise.

Tariff rates of a double bedded houseboat show that a non A/C house boat is available in the off-season at the rate of ₹ 4000 to ₹ 8000 and ₹ 6000 to ₹ 8500 for a day and full-day and night cruise respectively. Tourists can get an air

conditioned double bedded houseboat in the off season for ₹ 5500 to ₹ 10000 for a day's cruise and ₹ 7000 to ₹ 14000 for a full day and night cruise. The tariff charged by the houseboat operators during the season for an air conditioned houseboat ranges from ₹ 8000 to ₹ 18000 for a day's cruise and ₹ 10000 to ₹ 22000 for a full day and night cruise.

❖ **Online Booking Facility :** Online booking facility is an additional advantage for both tourists and service providers. The Table 4 shows the details of online booking facility. 70 percent of the houseboat operators had online booking facility.

| Table 4 : Online Booking of Houseboats |                         |                       |            |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Sl.No                                  | Online Booking Facility | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
| 1.                                     | Yes                     | 28                    | 70         |
| 2.                                     | No                      | 12                    | 30         |
|                                        | <b>Total</b>            | <b>40</b>             | <b>100</b> |
| Source: Primary Data                   |                         |                       |            |

❖ **Collection through Online Booking :** During the season, most of the houseboats are booked three months in advance through tour operators or through online booking. The details of percentage of tariff rate collection through online bookings is given in the Table 5.

| Table 5 : Percentage of Tariff Collected Through Online Booking |                                |                    |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Sl.No                                                           | Percentage of Tariff Collected | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
| 1.                                                              | Full Amount                    | 28                 | 70         |
| 2.                                                              | Up to 80 per cent              | 8                  | 20         |
| 3.                                                              | Up to 60 per cent              | 4                  | 10         |
|                                                                 | <b>Total</b>                   | <b>40</b>          | <b>100</b> |
| Source: Primary Data                                            |                                |                    |            |

The Table 5 reveals that most of the respondents (70 per cent) collected the full amount through online booking. Only 10 per cent of the operators collected up to 60 per cent of the tariff and 20 per cent of the boat operators collected up to 80 per cent of the tariff rates.

❖ **Methods of Attracting Tourists :** In tourism marketing, the intermediaries play an important role. This can be identified from the ways in which service providers are getting tourists. The methods of attracting tourists by the house boat operators can be inferred from the Table 6.

| Table 6 : Methods of Attracting Tourists By Boat Operators |                            |                        |                             |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Sl.No                                                      | Ways of Getting Tourists   | Percentage of Tourists | Number of service providers | Percentage |
| 1.                                                         | Through travel agents      | Up to 80               | 25                          | 62.5       |
|                                                            | Tour Operators and Hotels  | Up to 90               | 15                          | 37.5       |
|                                                            |                            | Total                  | 40                          | 100        |
| 2.                                                         | Online Reservation         | Up to 10               | 22                          | 78.25      |
|                                                            |                            | Total                  | 6                           | 21.42      |
| 3.                                                         | Direct Arrival of Tourists | Up to 15               | 28                          | 100        |
|                                                            |                            | Up to 5                | 32                          | 80         |
|                                                            |                            | Up to 10               | 8                           | 20         |
|                                                            |                            | Total                  | 40                          | 100        |
| Source: Primary Data                                       |                            |                        |                             |            |

The Table 6 shows that 25 sample units (62.5 per cent) were getting up to 80 per cent of their tourists through travel agents, the remaining 37.5 per cent got up to 90 per cent of their tourists from travel agents. 70 per cent of houseboat operators had the provision of online booking, where 78.5 per cent of the houseboat operators got up to 10 per cent of the tourists through online bookings. The direct arrival of tourists represented only up to 5 to 10 per cent of the customers.

## 2) TOURISTS' OPINION OF BACKWATER TOURISM

| Table 7 : Boating Option Preferred and Obtained in Alappuzha - Domestic Tourists |                 |                    |            |          |            |    |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|----------|------------|----|------------|
| Sl.No                                                                            | Type of Boating | Preferred          |            | Obtained |            |    |            |
|                                                                                  |                 | Number of Tourists | Percentage | Yes      | Percentage | No | Percentage |
| 1.                                                                               | Houseboat       | 130                | 72.22      | 125      | 96.15      | 6  | 3.84       |
| 2.                                                                               | Motor boat      | 48                 | 26.67      | 32       | 66.67      | 16 | 33.33      |
| 3.                                                                               | Speed boat      | 20                 | 11.11      | 12       | 60         | 8  | 40         |
| 4.                                                                               | Water skating   | 10                 | 5.55       | 4        | 40         | 6  | 60         |
| 5.                                                                               | Raw boat        | 40                 | 22.22      | 34       | 85         | 6  | 15         |
| 6.                                                                               | Shinkari boat   | 21                 | 23.88      | 28       | -          | -  | -          |
| Source: Primary Data                                                             |                 |                    |            |          |            |    |            |

❖ **Boating Option Preferred and Obtained in Alappuzha :** From the Table 7, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents preferred a houseboat (72.22per cent) to enjoy the back waters of Alappuzha, followed by motor boats, raw boats, shinkari boats and water skating. Majority of the respondents obtained the same type of boat they had preferred, except in the case of water skating. However, many respondents didn't get their choice of ride - 33.33 per cent of the respondents were unable to get a motor boat, 60 per cent were unable to indulge in water skating, 40 per cent were unable to obtain a speed boat and 15 per cent did not get their choice - the raw boat. In Alappuzha, boat operators are providing only Houseboats ; Shinkari boats, Speed boats, Water skating and Raw boats are provided by the hotels and resorts. This may be the reason that some of the tourists could not get a chance to ride the boat of their choice. Water skating and speed boat facility is provided by the luxurious accommodation service providers only.

| Table 8 : Boating Option Preferred and Obtained In Alappuzha By Foreign Tourists |                 |                    |            |          |            |     |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|----------|------------|-----|------------|
| Sl.No                                                                            | Type of Boating | Preferred          |            | Obtained |            |     |            |
|                                                                                  |                 | Number of Tourists | Percentage | Yes      | Percentage | No  | Percentage |
| 1.                                                                               | House boat      | 93                 | 77.5       | 93       | 100        | Nil | Nil        |
| 2.                                                                               | Motor boat      | 41                 | 34         | 34       | 83         | 7   | 17         |
| 3.                                                                               | Speed boat      | 20                 | 17         | 15       | 75         | 5   | 25         |
| 4.                                                                               | Water skating   | 14                 | 12         | 9        | 64         | 5   | 36         |
| 5.                                                                               | Raw boat        | 34                 | 28         | 31       | 91         | 3   | 9          |
| 6.                                                                               | Shinkari boat   | 7                  | 6          | 13       | -          | -   | -          |
| Source: Primary Data                                                             |                 |                    |            |          |            |     |            |

The Table 8 shows that the houseboats were the most demanded boats to enjoy the back waters and canals of Alappuzha, followed by motor boats, speed boats, water skating and Shinkari boats. It can be observed from the Table 8 that 36 per cent of the foreign tourists who preferred water skating, 25 percent who preferred speed boats, 17 and 9 percent of the tourists who preferred motor boats and raw boats were unable to obtain the same. The authorities should make the necessary arrangements for the availability of these boats ( as per the tourists' requirement).



| Table 9 : Tourists' Rating About Their Boating Experience in Alappuzha |              |                    |            |                    |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Sl.No                                                                  | Opinion      | Domestic Tourists  |            | Foreign Tourists   |            |
|                                                                        |              | Number of Tourists | Percentage | Number of Tourists | Percentage |
| 1.                                                                     | Very poor    | 17                 | 9.44       | 6                  | 5          |
| 2.                                                                     | Fair         | 11                 | 6.11       | 16                 | 13.33      |
| 3.                                                                     | Good         | 80                 | 44.45      | 33                 | 27.5       |
| 4.                                                                     | Very Good    | 36                 | 20         | 27                 | 22.5       |
| 5.                                                                     | Excellent    | 36                 | 20         | 38                 | 31.67      |
|                                                                        | <b>Total</b> | <b>180</b>         | <b>100</b> | <b>120</b>         | <b>100</b> |
| Source: Primary Data                                                   |              |                    |            |                    |            |

| Table 10 : Opinion About the Cleanliness of the Backwaters and Canals |              |                    |            |                    |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Sl.No                                                                 | Opinion      | Domestic Tourists  |            | Foreign Tourists   |            |
|                                                                       |              | Number of Tourists | Percentage | Number of Tourists | Percentage |
| 1.                                                                    | Very poor    | 38                 | 21.11      | 28                 | 23.33      |
| 2.                                                                    | Poor         | 73                 | 40.56      | 43                 | 35.84      |
| 3.                                                                    | Average      | 60                 | 33.33      | 39                 | 32.50      |
| 4.                                                                    | Good         | 9                  | 5.00       | 10                 | 8.33       |
| 5.                                                                    | Excellent    | -                  | -          | -                  | -          |
|                                                                       | <b>Total</b> | <b>180</b>         | <b>100</b> | <b>120</b>         | <b>100</b> |
| Source: Primary Data                                                  |              |                    |            |                    |            |

❖ **Tourist's Rating About the Backwater Tourism in Alappuzha :** Rating by the tourists about their boating experience in Alappuzha is given in the Table 9. The details of the analysis given in the Table 9 shows that as per the five point rating scale, most of the (44.45 per cent) domestic tourists rated the boating service to be good. In case of the foreign tourists, most of them (31.67 per cent) rated the boating service to be excellent. 27.5 and 22.5 per cent of the foreign tourists rated the boating service to be good and very good respectively. 20 per cent of the domestic tourists rated the boating service to be very good and excellent.

❖ **Opinion about the Cleanliness of the Backwaters and Canals :** A cruise through the backwaters and canals is one of the most important tourism attractions in Alappuzha. The tourists can witness the village life and natural scenic beauty while they are cruising through the backwaters. The tourists' opinion regarding the cleanliness of the backwaters is given in the Table 10. It is clear from the Table 10 that none of the domestic and foreign tourists rated the cleanliness aspect to be excellent . Only 5 and 8.33 per cent of the domestic and foreign tourists rated the cleanliness of the backwaters as good. 40.56 and 35.84 per cent of the domestic and foreign tourists rated the cleanliness of the backwaters as poor. The Table 10 also shows that most of the tourists i.e. 61.67 and 59.17 per cent of the domestic and international tourists rated the cleanliness of the backwaters as below average, i.e. poor and very poor.

### 3) PROBLEMS FACED BY THE HOUSEBOAT OPERATORS

The houseboat industry in Alappuzha, which attracts thousands of foreigners and provides employment to the unemployed youths of Alappuzha is finding it difficult to face unpleasant truths. In this section, efforts are made to rank the problems faced by the house boat operators.

**1) Parking of Boats :** In Alappuzha, 586 houseboats are operating from three different check -in points : Finishing point (Nehru trophy boat race finishing point) at Alappuzha town, Pallathuruthu - 2 km south from Alappuzha town at Alappuzha Changanasserry road and Punnamada check in point at Punnamada. Houseboats registered in Kerala can operate anywhere in Kerala. The finishing point is the main center, and more than 450 houseboats are operated from here. The houseboat industry has developed massively over the past few years, but the government is not focusing

much on the development of these centers. At the finishing point, there was a facility to park only 50 boats conveniently at a time.

**2) Unhealthy Competition :** Another problem faced by the houseboat operators is unhealthy competition. The unlicensed guides mislead the tourists. They wait at the railway station and at the bus stands for the arrival of the tourists. The number of houseboats is increasing considerably, and this has led to stiff competition. This is the reason as to why the government has imposed restriction on giving new licenses for two years. The agents are making a good amount of money by directly collecting money from the tourists - this happens mainly in the off-season, when domestic and local tourists visit without prior booking.

**3) Lack of Government Support and Infrastructural Facilities :** The local government is responsible for giving adequate support to the tourism sector. At the check in point (from where the cruise starts), there is no amenity center for the tourists and the condition of the roads leading to the check in point is quite bad.

**4) Corruption Delaying Granting of Licenses :** Houseboat operators have to get a license from three different offices; Canal Office, Pollution Control, and the Tax office. Inadequate staff at these offices is the main reason for the delay in granting licenses to the boat operators. Sometimes, it may even take two years for getting a license. This also leads to corruption and malpractices. Every year, the boat operators have to get a clearance certificate. In Alappuzha canal office, there is only one inspector to check the conditions of the boat.

**5) High Maintenance Cost :** The cost of a double bedroom houseboat ranges from ₹18 lakhs to ₹45 lakhs. The annual maintenance cost for an ordinary houseboat is around ₹75000 to ₹100000 and every day house boat operators spend ₹500 on maintenance. In Alappuzha, there are three houseboat manufacturing units, but the absence of skilled workers for small maintenance and annual maintenance is one of the main problem which the boat operators face.

**6) Cleanliness of the Backwaters :** Lack of cleanliness of the backwaters is another difficulty faced by the houseboat operators. Lack of cleanliness prevents the houseboat operators to operate in tiny canals.

**7) Difficulty in Getting Licensed Drivers :** It generally takes two years for completing all the procedures for getting a license for the drivers. Majority of the houseboat operators are of the opinion that the seasonal nature of their operation is the most important constraint faced by them.

The respondents were asked to rank the problems in order of priority. By using the Garrett's ranking technique, the problems faced by houseboat operators were ranked. The details are given in the Table 11.

| Table 11 : Problems Faced By The Houseboat Operators |                                                        |                      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------|
| Sl.No                                                | Problems                                               | Garrett's Mean Score | Rank |
| 1.                                                   | Parking of boats                                       | 68.12                | 1    |
| 2.                                                   | Unhealthy competition                                  | 64.66                | 2    |
| 3.                                                   | Inadequate Government support                          | 56.43                | 3    |
| 4.                                                   | Corruption & delay in issuing the license by officials | 54.68                | 4    |
| 5.                                                   | High maintenance cost                                  | 42.48                | 5    |
| 6.                                                   | Cleanliness of back waters                             | 40.88                | 6    |
| 7.                                                   | Difficulty in getting licensed drivers and personnel   | 31.18                | 7    |
| Source: Primary Data                                 |                                                        |                      |      |

The analysis of the result of Garrett's ranking shows that Parking of boats ; Unhealthy competition, and Lack of Government support were the first three main problems faced by the houseboat operators. Corruption and delay in issuing of licenses by the officials, lack of cleanliness of the backwaters, and high-maintenance costs were ranked as fourth, fifth and sixth difficulties with mean scores of 42.48 and 40.88 respectively. Among the seven problems that were ranked, difficulty in getting licensed drivers was the least important problem with a mean score of 31.18.



| Table 12 : Levels of Satisfaction of Domestic Tourists |                                 |       |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| Sl.No.                                                 | Components                      | Score | Interpretation      |
| 1.                                                     | Attraction                      | 72.2  | Highly satisfied    |
| 2.                                                     | Accommodation                   | 52.9  | Satisfied           |
| 3.                                                     | Transportation                  | 47.2  | Average             |
| 4.                                                     | Food and Drinks                 | 62.9  | Satisfied           |
| 5.                                                     | Availability of Information     | 63.6  | Satisfied           |
| 6.                                                     | Infrastructure                  | 25.1  | Dissatisfied        |
| 7.                                                     | Entertainment Facilities        | 47.2  | Satisfied           |
| 8.                                                     | Currency exchange               | -     | -                   |
| 9.                                                     | Shopping                        | 49.1  | Average             |
| 10.                                                    | Cleanliness and hygiene factors | 13.2  | Highly Dissatisfied |
| 11.                                                    | Guide services                  | 57.6  | Satisfied           |
| 12.                                                    | Medical facilities              | 59.2  | Satisfied           |
| 13.                                                    | Police and security services    | 46.6  | Average             |
| 14.                                                    | Climatic conditions             | 73.9  | Highly Dissatisfied |
| Source: Primary Data                                   |                                 |       |                     |

#### 4) LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OF THE TOURISTS

Tourism is the most important consumer service. The success of tourism depends upon the level of satisfaction the tourists have with the service providers. Tourism products can be seen as composite products that are the sum total of tourist attractions, transport, accommodation, entertainment and all other services they need, which hopefully results in consumer satisfaction. This section analyses tourists' satisfaction by taking into consideration all the main elements of tourism products and factors which may affect the satisfaction level of the tourists.

❖ **Domestic Tourists** : Levels of satisfaction of the domestic tourists can be inferred from the Table 12. The Table 12 shows that the domestic tourists were highly satisfied with attractions and climatic condition of Alappuzha. They were

| Table 13 : Levels of Satisfaction of Foreign Tourists |                                 |       |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| Sl.No.                                                | Components                      | Score | Interpretation      |
| 1.                                                    | Attraction                      | 77.6  | Highly satisfied    |
| 2.                                                    | Accommodation                   | 61.2  | Satisfied           |
| 3.                                                    | Transportation                  | 46.2  | Average             |
| 4.                                                    | Food and Drinks                 | 63.2  | Satisfied           |
| 5.                                                    | Availability of Information     | 42.1  | Average             |
| 6.                                                    | Infrastructure                  | 14.6  | Highly Dissatisfied |
| 7.                                                    | Entertainment Facilities        | 42.3  | Average             |
| 8.                                                    | Currency exchange               | 61.3  | Satisfied           |
| 9.                                                    | Shopping                        | 42.9  | Average             |
| 10.                                                   | Cleanliness and hygiene factors | 13.1  | Highly Dissatisfied |
| 11.                                                   | Guide services                  | 47    | Average             |
| 12.                                                   | Medical facilities              | 64    | Satisfied           |
| 13.                                                   | Police and security services    | 29.1  | Dissatisfied        |
| 14.                                                   | Climatic conditions             | 82.2  | Highly Dissatisfied |
| Source: Primary Data                                  |                                 |       |                     |

satisfied with the accommodation, food and drinks, communication facilities, entertainment facilities, guide facilities, and medical facilities. With regards to shopping, police and security services, and transportation facilities, the domestic tourists showed only an average level of satisfaction. The domestic tourists were dissatisfied with the infrastructure facilities. It is very important to mention here that the domestic tourists were highly dissatisfied with the cleanliness and hygiene factors.

❖ **Foreign Tourists :** The Table 13 shows that the foreign tourists were highly satisfied with the attractions and climatic condition of Alappuzha. They were satisfied with the accommodation facilities, food and drinks, communication facilities, currency exchange. However, they reported an average level of satisfaction with the transportation facilities, entertainment facilities, shopping, and guide services. The foreign tourists reported dissatisfaction with infrastructure facilities, and were highly dissatisfied with the cleanliness and hygiene factors.

## SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are put forward for the development of tourism in Alappuzha.

**1) More Emphasis and Long-term Planning For the Development of Backwaters and Canals :** Most of the tourists rated the cleanliness of backwaters and canals as poor or very poor, and the lack of cleanliness also creates problems for houseboat operators and resorts. Therefore, there should be a permanent arrangement for cleaning the canals and backwaters. Tourists are interested to cruise through tiny canals to witness the village and scenic beauty of Alappuzha; unfortunately, many of the tiny canals are not navigable owing to the accumulation of weeds, mud and other pollutants. Hence, it is very important to make all the tiny canals navigable by cleaning the canals and removing the accumulated waste, mud, etc. Immediate steps should be taken to remove or heighten the criss-crossed cable lines and electrical lines that prevent the passage of houseboats. Steps should be taken to uplift Mettathodu Palam, S.N.D.P Thodu Palam also.

**2) Development of Infrastructural Facilities :** Houseboat operators and accommodation service providers were dissatisfied with the present infrastructure facilities. The authorities should give more priority to the development of infrastructure facilities. The main tourist centers should be developed with adequate infrastructural facilities - such as good condition of roads, street lights and toilets, which are the pre-requisites of a good tourist place. Immediate steps should be taken to improve the sanitary conditions. The authorities should immediately develop an amenity center at the finishing point, from where hundreds of houseboats operate.

**3) Planned Development of the Houseboat Industry :** The number of houseboat operators has increased substantially over the past few years; no doubt this has reduced the tariff rates considerably, but it has also lead to unhealthy competition, and absence of proper planning may also lead to more serious problems. The Government machinery to manage, inspect and issue licenses to the houseboats is quite inadequate. It leads to unnecessary delays and leaves ground for malpractices. Immediate steps should be taken to solve this problem.

The houseboat operators have to get a license from three different offices, and it also includes fulfilling a number of formalities for the municipal authorities. Proper introduction of the 'single window' system would be highly beneficial for the houseboat operators. It is better to charge the pollution license fee on the basis of the number of bedrooms in a houseboat and not according to the investment because pollution increases in proportion to the number of tourists. As parking of the boats is the most important problem faced by the houseboat operators every day, immediate steps must be taken to develop this facility, especially at the finishing points. Infrastructural facilities should also be developed at the finishing points.

**4) Insurance to Backwater Tourists :** European countries have made it compulsory that insurance coverage should be given for cruise passengers. None of the houseboat operators are providing insurance coverage to their passengers because the insurance companies are not providing the same. Authorities should take necessary steps to solve this serious problem, otherwise, this industry may lose all tourists from the western countries in the years to come.

**5) Unauthorized guides may misguide the tourists to pave way for unhealthy competition among the service providers.** The police and the DTPC should carefully take proper steps to resolve this problem.

- 6) Ensure availability of accurate information and local transportation facilities. Sanitary conditions and shopping facilities also need to be improved.
- 7) Ensure the availability of water skating, motor boats and speed boats.
- 8) Proper dress code should be implemented for the houseboat staff.

## CONCLUSION

The Tourism industry is an intensively people-oriented industry. Tourism changes the outlook of the people and provides livelihood to the host people. It is the best in world trade, and is also the largest export earner; therefore, tourism services are to be marketed effectively. Backwaters are the most important tourism attraction for the foreign and domestic tourists in Kerala. The present study analyzed the marketing activities adopted by the houseboat operators, their difficulties, tourists' opinion about the backwater tourism and their satisfaction levels. The analysis of the results of Garrett's ranking about the problems faced by the houseboat operators revealed that parking of boats, unhealthy competition, lack of government support, corruption, lack of cleanliness of backwaters were the major problems faced by the operators. The authorities should take necessary steps to solve these major struggles.

Cruising along the backwaters of Kerala in a houseboat is an enchanting experience. Such a wonderful experience cannot be obtained anywhere around the globe and the high level of satisfaction of the tourists about backwater tourism, natural attractions, climatic conditions of the backwater regions of Kerala highlights the scope for development of future prospects of tourism in the State. Such an opportunity to further develop the backwaters needs to be properly utilized by developing long term plans for the sustainable development of this industry.

## SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study is limited to a particular geographical area, i.e. Alappuzha District - the major backwater tourism destination of Kerala. There exists future scope for such studies by incorporating other geographical regions like Kumaramangalam and Ernakulam.

Hill Tourism and Beach Tourism are the other major tourism products of Kerala. The scope of linkage between Backwater Tourism and Hill Tourism, Backwater Tourism and Beach Tourism can be studied separately.

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