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ENHANCING FOREIGN TOURISM IN KERALA: THE ROLE OF THE TOURISM PROMOTION COUNCIL

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Abstract

Kerala, has successfully marketed its natural beauty and cultural heritage, establishing itself as a prime destination for both domestic and international tourists. The Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC) has played a pivotal role in this success by implementing targeted campaigns, which highlight the state's diverse tourism offerings, such as eco-tourism, medical tourism, and cultural tourism. Kerala's tourism sector has seen impressive growth, with a significant increase in foreign tourist arrivals, contributing greatly to the state's economy through revenue generation, employment, and infrastructure development. This study aims to assess the impact of KTPC's initiatives on foreign tourist arrivals, evaluate the economic contributions of foreign tourism, and explore challenges and future strategies for sustainable tourism promotion in Kerala. By analyzing secondary data from government reports, KTPC publications, and tourism industry journals, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the relationship between tourism promotion and foreign tourist inflow. The research also identifies challenges such as seasonal fluctuations and environmental concerns while recommending strategies like off-season tourism and eco-tourism to ensure the state's long-term success in the global tourism market.

Keywords: Kerala Tourism Promotion Council, foreign tourists, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, economic contribution, tourism infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

One of the few states that has successfully marketed its natural beauty to the vacation travel sector is Kerala. Renowned for its rich heritage and cultural diversity, the state has become a popular destination for travellers globally. Often referred to as "God's Own Country," Kerala saw remarkable tourism growth in 2022, drawing 18 million domestic visitors

and 345,549 international tourists, marking an impressive year-on-year increase of 152%. Tourism is a vital contributor to Kerala's economy, attracting millions of visitors each year, both domestic and foreign (Kerala Tourism Department, 2023). Kerala's unique cultural heritage, pristine beaches, tranquil backwaters, lush landscapes, and ancient Ayurveda practices have established the state as a prime tourism destination. The state's tourism industry has witnessed significant growth, with foreign tourist arrivals steadily increasing over the years. In 2019, Kerala recorded over 1.2 million foreign tourists, contributing significantly to the state's economy by generating employment and supporting local businesses (Kerala Tourism, 2020). The Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC) plays a pivotal role in this success by promoting the state's tourism offerings and implementing marketing campaigns that position Kerala as a global tourist hub.

The Kerala Tourism Promotion Council was established to facilitate the growth of the tourism sector by formulating policies, promoting marketing strategies, and coordinating with stakeholders. One of the council's most notable campaigns, "God's Own Country," has significantly contributed to boosting Kerala's international reputation. KTPC's strategies involve promoting diverse forms of tourism, like eco-tourism, medical tourism, and cultural tourism, targeting foreign tourists from key markets such as the U.S., the UK, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, (Kerala Tourism, 2021). These efforts have not only enhanced tourist arrivals but have also fostered sustainable tourism practices by encouraging the responsible development of tourist infrastructure.

In light of these developments, this study aims to assess the impact of KTPC's initiatives on foreign tourist arrivals, evaluate the economic contributions of foreign tourism, and explore the challenges and future strategies for sustainable tourism promotion. By relying on secondary data, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between tourism promotion and foreign tourist inflow, highlighting the key strategies that could shape the future of Kerala's tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism has become one of the most significant economic drivers in Kerala, with a growing number of foreign tourists visiting the state each year. Researchers and authors have explored the various factors contributing to the success of Kerala's tourism industry, highlighting the crucial role played by the Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC).

According to the research by **Arun and Mohanan (2021)**, KTPC's collaboration with local communities and tourism stakeholders has fostered the development of unique tourism products that appeal to a wide range of international tourists. They argue that Kerala's success lies not only in its marketing campaigns but also in its competence to create authentic and culturally rich experiences for visitors.

Kumar and Mohan (2020) who argue that Kerala's emphasis on eco-tourism has allowed the state to differentiate itself from other tourism destinations while maintaining a commitment to sustainable practices. However, there are challenges to Kerala's tourism growth.

Varghese and Thomas (2020) echoed that while foreign tourist arrivals in Kerala have grown, the state's reliance on specific tourist seasons has made it vulnerable to changes in travel patterns and global economic conditions. To address these challenges, the authors propose

strategies like diversifying the tourism offerings and promoting off-season tourism to maintain a steady flow of visitors throughout the year. Despite the challenges, several authors agree that KTPC's strategic initiatives have played a significant role in transforming Kerala into a leading global tourist destination.

Sreenivas (2019) discusses the issue of seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals, which impacts businesses that depend on consistent visitor traffic. In a study on the role of KTPC in shaping Kerala's tourism policies. This finding is supported by the report from the Ministry of Tourism (2018), which states that tourism is a major source of revenue for Kerala, accounting for a significant portion of its GDP.

Radhakrishnan (2018) highlights the council's contribution to sustainable tourism development. The author notes that KTPC's initiatives go beyond mere promotion, as the council works closely with local communities, government agencies, and private stakeholders to ensure that tourism growth is balanced with environmental sustainability.

Nair (2017) discusses the impact of Kerala's tourism on the local economy, noting that foreign tourist arrivals have contributed significantly to employment generation, infrastructure development, and the growth of related sectors like hospitality and transportation. According to this report, foreign tourist arrivals have grown at a steady pace over the years, and Kerala has become one of the top destinations for international tourists in India.

According to **Soni and Sharma (2016)**, Kerala's tourism growth is largely attributed to its well-targeted promotional campaigns, such as "God's Own Country," which has successfully located the state as an exclusive destination for both international and domestic tourists. The authors emphasize the importance of marketing strategies in attracting foreign tourists and suggest that KTPC's branding efforts have been instrumental in increasing Kerala's visibility on the global tourism map.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the impact of Kerala Tourism Promotion Council's initiatives on foreign tourist arrivals.
- To evaluate the contribution of foreign tourism to Kerala's economy.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study primarily relied on secondary data collection, sourcing information from government reports, publications from the Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC), academic research papers, and tourism industry journals. Key statistics related to foreign tourist arrivals over the past decade were collected from reports by the Ministry of Tourism, Kerala Tourism, and other relevant agencies, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of trends and growth patterns.

KERALA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

The state's tourism success can be attributed to a variety of factors, including targeted promotional campaigns, government initiatives, and a focus on sustainable tourism. The Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC) has played a fundamental role in shaping and marketing the state's tourism offerings through campaigns such as the "God's Own Country" initiative, which emphasizes Kerala's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Kumar and Mohan (2020) highlight that Kerala's tourism development has embraced eco-tourism and responsible tourism, balancing economic growth with environmental conservation. In addition, the state's

government has invested in infrastructure projects such as improved airports, roadways, and tourism facilities to enhance the overall visitor experience. This commitment to sustainable growth and the diversification of tourism products has helped Kerala maintain its position as one of India's top tourism destinations. Despite the success, Kerala's tourism industry faces challenges, such as seasonal fluctuations and environmental concerns. As Sreenivas (2019) points out, the heavy reliance on peak tourist seasons can create instability for businesses dependent on a steady stream of visitors throughout the year. Additionally, the pressure on the state's natural resources and ecosystems requires careful management to preserve Kerala's appeal to future generations of travellers. In response to these challenges, Kerala is focusing on expanding its tourism offerings beyond traditional peak seasons and promoting initiatives like eco-tourism, digital marketing, and off-season packages to attract tourists year-round.

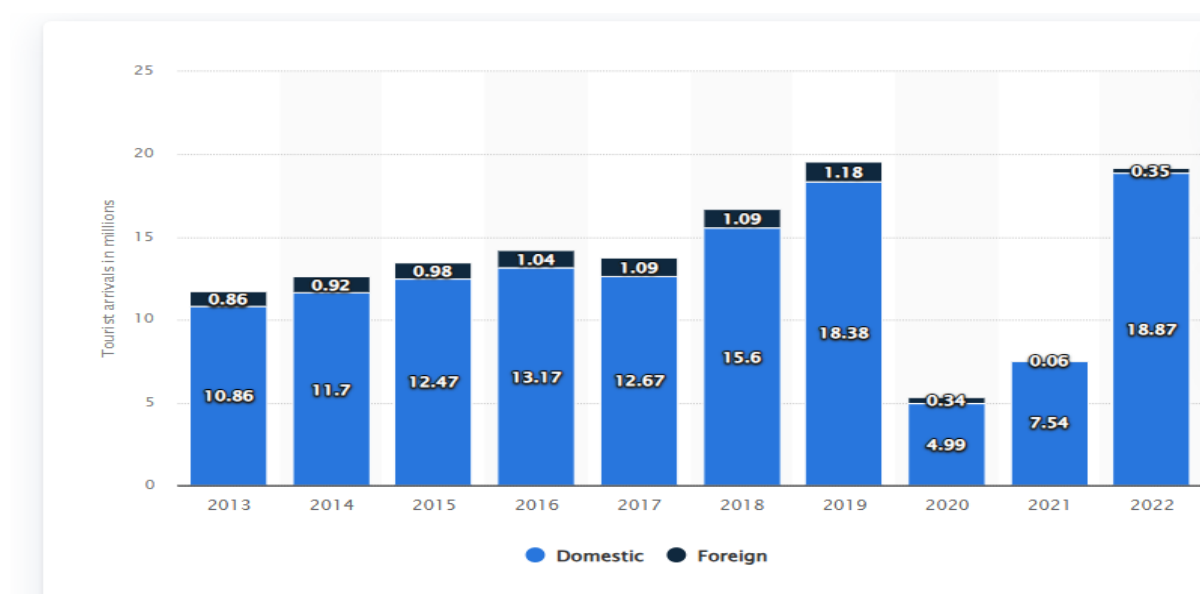


Fig 1: Tourist arrivals, both foreign and domestic, in Kerala, India from 2013 to 2022.(in millions) (Source: <https://www.statista.com>)

ROLE OF KERALA TOURISM PROMOTION COUNCIL (KTPC)

The Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC) plays a crucial role in shaping the state's tourism industry, both domestically and internationally. Established by the Government of Kerala, KTPC is responsible for formulating and implementing policies, conducting promotional campaigns, and collaborating with various stakeholders in the tourism sector. One of the most successful initiatives of KTPC is the "God's Own Country" campaign, which has significantly contributed to the state's branding and recognition on the global tourism map. According to Nair (2017), KTPC's marketing strategies have been instrumental in positioning Kerala as a unique destination offering a blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and wellness tourism. By focusing on targeted campaigns and events, KTPC has helped Kerala attract a steady influx of both domestic and foreign tourists, leading to substantial economic growth in the region.

Additionally, KTPC plays an essential role in development of tourism infrastructure and services in Kerala. By working with the government and private sector, KTPC has been

involved in upgrading infrastructure such as airports, hotels, and transportation systems, which are crucial for attracting international tourists. According to the Kerala Tourism Annual Report (2020), KTPC's strategic collaborations have led to the establishment of world-class facilities and services that cater to the growing demand for high-quality tourism experiences. Moreover, the council's focus on promoting lesser-known destinations within the state has helped distribute tourism benefits to regions outside of the traditional hotspots, thereby reducing overcrowding and promoting inclusive growth.

TRENDS IN FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN KERALA

Growth Patterns Over the Years

Foreign tourist visits (FTVs) to Kerala have shown varying trends over the years. The table below outlines the changes in foreign and domestic tourist visits from 2019 to 2022.

Table 1: Foreign Tourist Visits (FTVs) to Kerala from 2019 to 2022

Year	Domestic Tourist Visits (DTV)	Foreign Tourist Visits (FTV)	Annual Growth Rate (DTV)	Annual Growth Rate (FTV)
2019	1,83,84,233	11,89,771	17.81%	8.52%
2020	49,88,972	3,40,755	-72.86%	-71.36%
2021	75,37,617	60,487	51.09%	-82.25%
2022	1,88,67,414	3,45,549	150.31%	471.28%

(Source: <https://www.keralatourism.org>)

The trends in foreign tourist visits (FTVs) to Kerala over the years show significant fluctuations, especially with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, Kerala recorded a healthy increase in both domestic and foreign tourist visits, with FTVs reaching 1.2 million and an annual growth rate of 8.52%. However, the pandemic's onset in 2020 caused a sharp decline in tourism, with foreign tourist arrivals plummeting by 71.36% due to global travel restrictions and safety concerns. This sharp drop in FTVs, which fell to just 340,755, mirrors the broader decline in global tourism during the pandemic. In 2021, Kerala's foreign tourism continued to be significantly impacted, with a further decline of 82.25% in foreign tourist arrivals. Despite the challenging circumstances, domestic tourism began to show signs of recovery with a 51.09% increase. The recovery in foreign tourism became evident in 2022, when FTVs surged by 471.28%, reaching 345,549, indicating a strong rebound as travel restrictions eased and international tourism gradually resumed. Domestic tourism also saw a remarkable recovery in 2022, with a 150.31% increase, reflecting the growing confidence in travel and the resumption of normal tourism activities in Kerala.

Country-wise Distribution of Foreign Tourists

Most foreign tourists visiting Kerala in 2022 came from the following countries:

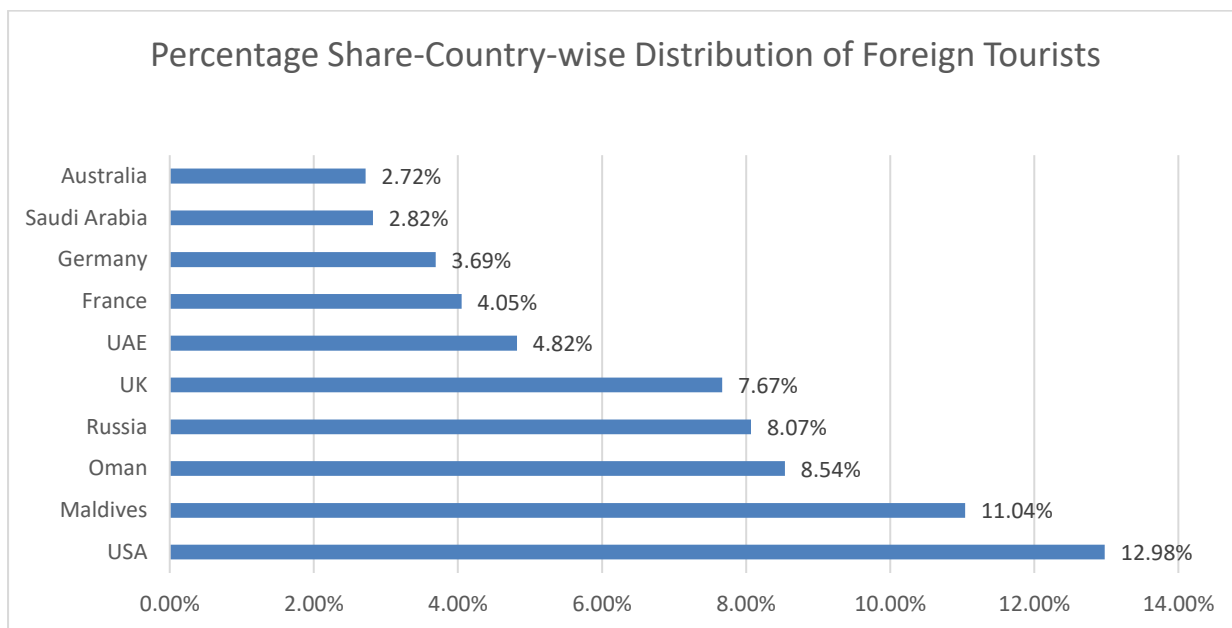


Fig 2: Most Foreign Tourists Visiting Kerala in 2022 (Source: <https://www.keralatourism.org>)

These ten countries accounted for 66.4% of the total foreign tourist visits to Kerala in 2022. In 2022, Kerala saw a significant influx of foreign tourists, with a diverse range of countries contributing to the state's tourism industry. The United States emerged as the top contributor, accounting for 12.98% of foreign tourist arrivals, followed by the Maldives with 11.04%. Other notable countries included Oman (8.54%), Russia (8.07%), and the United Kingdom (7.67%). This diverse demographic underscores Kerala's broad appeal, attracting visitors from both Western countries and neighboring regions in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. These nations represent key markets for Kerala's tourism industry, drawn to its unique offerings such as backwaters, Ayurveda, beaches, and cultural heritage. The data reveals the importance of international markets in shaping Kerala's tourism trends. While countries like the USA and the UK reflect the global appeal of Kerala's unique tourism experiences, regional visitors from countries like the Maldives, Oman, and the UAE also play a critical role. The relatively high percentage of Russian and European tourists, including those from France, Germany, and Australia, further indicates Kerala's growing attraction as an international travel destination. This diverse influx of tourists showcases the effectiveness of Kerala Tourism Promotion Council's (KTPC) marketing efforts, which have been tailored to appeal to a wide spectrum of global travellers.

Destination-wise Foreign Tourist Visits

Kochi City remained the most popular destination among foreign tourists, followed by Thiruvananthapuram and Kovalam.

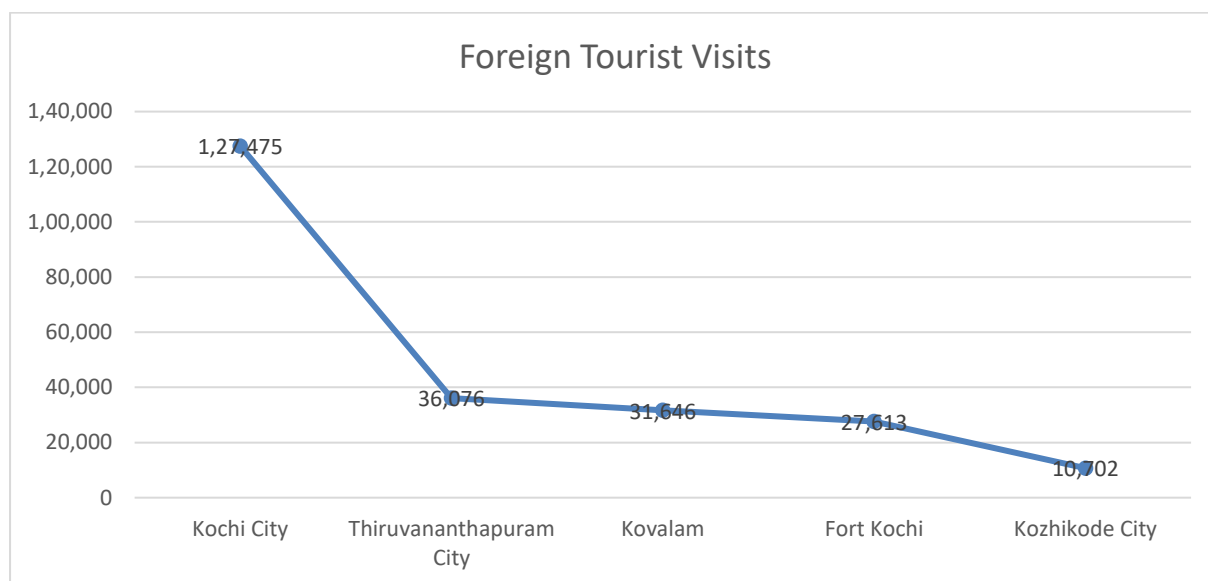


Fig 3: Destination-wise Foreign Tourist Visits (Source: <https://www.keralatourism.org>)

The Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC) has effectively positioned Kerala as a leading tourism destination by focusing on strategic marketing campaigns, including the well-known "God's Own Country" initiative. By targeting international markets and collaborating with various stakeholders, KTPC has helped Kerala maintain steady growth in foreign tourist arrivals, contributing to the state's economy through job creation and infrastructure development. This targeted promotion has enabled Kerala to emerge as a unique and attractive destination for global travellers. Key tourist destinations in Kerala, such as Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kovalam, have received a significant share of foreign tourist visits, reflecting the effectiveness of KTPC's promotional efforts. Kochi, in particular, leads with a 36.89% share of the total foreign tourist visits, followed by Thiruvananthapuram and Kovalam, which account for 10.44% and 9.16%, respectively. These destinations offer a combination of cultural heritage, natural beauty, and modern infrastructure, making them popular among international travelers. The table below provides an overview of the foreign tourist visits to key destinations in Kerala, illustrating the distribution of tourists across various cities and regions.

Impact of Tourism Promotion on Kerala's Economy

Tourism has been a significant contributor to Kerala's economy, providing employment to thousands and generating foreign exchange earnings.

Table 2: Foreign Exchange Earnings in Kerala

Year	Foreign Exchange Earnings (Crores)	% Variation
2019	10,271.06	17.19%
2020	2,799.85	-72.74%
2021	461.5	-83.52%
2022	2,792.42	505.07%

Source: www.keralatourism.org

The revenue from tourism in 2022 increased significantly compared to 2021 but had not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. Kerala's tourism industry is a considerable contributor to

the state's economy, particularly in terms of foreign exchange earnings. In 2019, Kerala's foreign exchange earnings were at their peak, amounting to ₹10,271.06 crores, reflecting a growth rate of 17.19%. However, the pandemic severely impacted tourism, leading to a drastic drop in earnings in 2020 and 2021. Foreign exchange earnings in 2020 fell to ₹2,799.85 crores, representing a decline of 72.74%, while 2021 saw an even sharper decline of 83.52%, with earnings dropping to ₹461.5 crores. The tourism sector began to recover in 2022, as evidenced by a remarkable 505.07% increase in foreign exchange earnings, reaching ₹2,792.42 crores. This resurgence can be attributed to the gradual easing of travel restrictions, the implementation of tourism recovery strategies by the Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC), and the resumption of global travel. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Kerala's tourism sector has demonstrated resilience, with its foreign exchange earnings showing a significant recovery in 2022. The recovery trajectory also highlights the importance of sustainable and diversified tourism offerings, as well as effective promotional campaigns, in bringing back international tourists and boosting Kerala's economic resilience.

CONCLUSION

Kerala's tourism sector has witnessed significant growth despite setbacks from the pandemic. The role of the Kerala Tourism Promotion Council has been instrumental in driving foreign tourist arrivals, improving infrastructure, and contributing to the state's economy. However, future growth will depend on sustainable tourism practices, strategic marketing, and innovative policies to position Kerala as a top global tourist destination. By implementing modern marketing strategies and enhancing infrastructure, Kerala can continue to attract international travellers and maintain its position as one of India's most sought-after tourist destinations. In conclusion, Kerala's tourism industry has been a significant contributor to the state's economy, bolstered by the efforts of the Kerala Tourism Promotion Council (KTPC). Through targeted marketing strategies like the "God's Own Country" campaign and a focus on sustainable tourism, KTPC has effectively promoted Kerala as a premier destination for foreign tourists. However, the industry faces challenges such as seasonal fluctuations, environmental concerns, and increasing competition from other destinations. These challenges require immediate attention and strategic responses to ensure the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector. To address these issues, KTPC must embrace modern strategies such as digital marketing, eco-tourism initiatives, and a stronger focus on Kerala's health and wellness tourism offerings. By diversifying its tourism products and enhancing its online presence, Kerala can maintain its competitive edge and attract a broader, more sustainable influx of international tourists. With continued innovation and collaboration, Kerala's tourism industry has the potential to recover fully and thrive in the years to come, while preserving its unique cultural and environmental heritage.

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