

# A Research Note : More to Ponder on the Perspectives of Sustainability of Tourism Destinations

*Sabari Shankar R.*<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This research note focused on tapping the research opportunities on the perspectives of sustainability on tourism destinations. Being a short communication, the research note was created using the literary sources that concentrated only on the sustainability of tourism destinations. Growing tourism attributes ; need for positioning destinations in competitive industrial markets ; rapid changes in tourism market characteristics, motives, and opportunities ; and mainly to sustain the tourism resources for better future consumption and preservation were the primitive forces to undertake the research note, which would facilitate further research works in the arena. The communications highlighted the integral and in-depth aspects such as centrality of sustainability, tourists' knowledge about sustainability, tourists' responsibility towards sustainability of destinations and natural resources, destination behavior towards sustainability, blending culture and sustainability, and rural destinations and their relevance on a sustainable future. Beneficial keynotes for policy makers and others thereof were enumerated throughout the note.

**Keywords :** tourism, destinations, sustainability, resources, culture, tourists' knowledge

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The tourism industry, perhaps one of the largest industries in world commerce, has huge potential opportunities in contribution to economic growth. With the advent of destination marketing approach, countries have witnessed an increase in the tourists' inflow, both home and host, and could position their tourism destinations lucratively in the competitive market. Specifically, India has its own privilege in offering distinct tourism products that serve wide tourist motives – from adventurous, nature, history, culture, religion, to spirituality. The potentiality to explore the new market segment bases and serve the value proposed offerings is appropriately high in Indian tourism, for example, food, sun seeking, family reunion, etc. There are abundant research studies on Indian tourism destinations pertaining to tourist behavior, branding, marketing, destination competitiveness, and sustainability. Those research studies have contributed to the betterment of the tourism industry, perhaps facilitated in formulating marketing strategies, policy making, and destination governance, etc. However, despite the number of studies emerging every year, the academia and the tourism industry always look for contributing effectively to sustainability of tourism destinations and their bestowed resources. Organizations contribute to sustainability through corporate social responsibility approaches ; perhaps, sustainability and corporate social responsibility are closely related (Batham, 2013) to protect the environment for a better future. Yet, the execution and planning for sustainable growth and development need colossal evidence and new ideologies in terms of tourism destinations. Based on this requirement, this research note has been written, which

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<sup>1</sup> *Assistant Professor*, Department of Professional Studies, Christ (Deemed to be University), Bangalore Central Campus, Hosur Road, Near Dairy Circle, Bengaluru - 560 029, Karnataka. (Email : [sabarishankar92@gmail.com](mailto:sabarishankar92@gmail.com)) ; ORCID iD : <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2463-2355>

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evokes future research ideologies on selective perspectives such as centrality of sustainability, tourists' knowledge about sustainability, tourists' responsibility towards sustainability of destinations and natural resources, destination behavior towards sustainability, blending culture and sustainability, and rural destinations and their relevance for a sustainable future. This research note would help researchers and industry practitioners by indicating that there is a need to penetrate further into the perspectives of sustainability with reference to tourism destinations.

## **Key Perspectives of Destination Sustainability**

### ***Centrality of Sustainability***

Where does sustainability lie? The question may look generic, but alternatively, can we ask that has the economy achieved sustainability? Probably there can be no finite answers because sustainability in the tourism context is not only protecting, but also handing over the invaluable tourism resources to the future. Martini and Buffa (2020) stated that sustainability cannot be avoided; both organizations and tourists have to be intimated and concerned of the same. This means that achieving sustainability would not be possible unless there is a blended contribution from organizations and people (tourists). Though there are many marketing blueprints executed by organizations to protect the tourism resources, a mediocre effect is seen. Does it mean that organizational strategies on sustainability are less effective? It is important to note that there are many strategies formulated by organizations on sustainable growth and executed with conclusive benefits, but limitations or gaps draw a new paradigm for future research. For example, Hanna et al. (2018) pointed out from their research that tourists are aware of sustainability but narrowed to the environmental aspects only and limited to think on social perspectives. That was a research based on focused group data of United Kingdom's potential tourists. However, the findings make preeminent relevance to further research. Even if governments, their bodies, and destination marketing organizations frame awareness elements on sustainability of tourism destinations, does the centrality inculcate all the characteristics of sustainability? It's preferable to add local communities, residents, other living beings, and oblivion components to it. Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of sustainability also lies with the attitude and behavior of tourists.

In Indian contexts, are we exposed to the awareness campaigns on how to tour responsibly, perhaps providing importance to social perspectives? Being one of the countries which has a rich heritage, deep mountain valleys, natural attractions, and bestowed with rural landscapes, does Indian tourism teach tourists on how to consume the tourism resources with a notion of not only to live in the present, but also be responsible to sustain the assets for future generations? The research activities in this area could even impact tourist perceptions and behavior positively, and also facilitate the interested parties to implement successful sustainable habits. Hence, the first emphasis of this research notes highlights that centrality of sustainability should inculcate the social perspectives too.

### ***Tourists' Salience on Sustainability***

The second emphasis is on the tourists' awareness on sustainability of tourism destinations and resources. Garg and Pandey's (2020) research found that consumer knowledge and personal norms had a compelling role on adopting sustainable tourism. Further, the research provided suggestions to the marketers on redesigning their marketing efforts by understanding the antecedents. Again, despite the generic awareness campaigns, what could the marketers contribute to reflect on the fullness of tourists adopting sustainable practices, which provides an opportunity to marketers and academic researchers? If sustainability is also about the social perspective as

indicated in the first note, that is, on enhancing the local people's lives in the destinations, does local buying or consumption play a vital role in destinations' sustainability? Even though there are many associative businesses in the destinations that depend on the tourists' inflow, marketing campaigns that depict the importance of purchasing or consuming the local products or services that contribute to local communities in tourism destinations perhaps impact the sustainability of the tourism destinations, which would add more cognitive peripherals to tourists' knowledge. It would reflect on the tourists' personal norms too in a positive way. Thus, it is important to note that the awareness campaigns on destination sustainability should also inculcate elements that represent local consumption and reflect on betterment of local economy and society.

### ***Individual Responsibility and Sustainability***

Sustainability, as a general phrase, has the characteristics of economics and environment etc. and blends with the interactions among governments, organizations, and tourists and their actions on achieving it. Common theory says that formulation of policies by governments, marketing campaigns by the marketers, and responsible tourists – all contribute to the sustainability of tourism. In this case on highlighting tourists' behavior, in terms of their individual responsibility, a question arises – does the tourists' responsibility reflect on their tour planning? To penetrate further, do tourists plan, choose, visit, and consume the tourism offerings thinking about the sustainability of the destinations? There also exists a void to think whether tourists' individual responsibility impacts the planning and implementing sustainability development strategies. One of the upcoming issues which are related to sustainability is capacity management – a management of crowd in tourism destinations.

Rajan et al. (2013) spoke about the capacity analysis for sustainable tourism development in their research paper that referred to the beaches in the south west coast of India. They stated that the expeditious growth of coastal tourism has led to the need for effective beach management so as to sustain the quality of our beaches. The research was beneficial in the management perspective, and evoked an ideology as to how an individual tourist or a prospective tourist could contribute to the capacity management of the destinations. For example, do tourists refrain from choosing the destinations thinking that they have a negative impact on the destinations' sustainability? Or do tourists avoid visiting crowded destinations thinking that they could ease the destination management? This is in purview of how far individual tourists contribute to capacity management that the destinations can handle. In other words, we can also look at: are there tourists who postpone their tour to later days just to avoid crowds and help destinations to sustain the resources? While many religious destinations in India have seasonality, perhaps due to the primitive factor of pilgrimage tourism, this could be a rare case. However, when tourists imbibe the motives to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism destinations, their personal norms align with their motives and behavior. Hence, this third note emphasizes the need for the researchers to understand the tourists' individual responsibility on the destinations' sustainability. Also, the note signals marketers to conceive the marketing campaigns that imbibe and impact tourists' responsible behavior and contribution to destination sustainability and management.

### ***Destinations' Responsibility and Sustainability***

The third note is related to individual responsibility, but it is also critical to look upon the destinations' responsibility too. Evidence lacks in literature on understanding how well the tourists' individual responsibility and destinations' social responsibility (destination sustainable practices) align together. Yu and Hwang (2019) stated that socially responsible behavior of destinations had an influence on tourists' loyalty. Here, the term 'destination behavior' refers to the behaviour of stakeholders. Many research studies have focused on the internal side of sustainability of tourism destinations, but the study by Yu and Hwang focused on tourists' perspectives. Here exists an opportunity to understand whether the tourists' behavior changes when the destinations' behavior is

aligned to sustainability. For example, is there an impact on tourists' perception and attitude towards sustainability of tourism destinations when the destinations themselves have a positive sustainable image and attitude? It is important to note that the studies on this perspective are in a gradual phase. This draws a quest as to whether opportunities exist for policy makers and destination marketers to inculcate a sustainable image or practices that would reflect on tourists' perception, attitude, and behavior.

A research work by Bhatti and Negi (2018) suggested on using eco friendly materials, for example, hoardings and boards, to create awareness among the consumers about green products. However, alternatively, could the outlets or the businesses that are located in the tourist destinations implement such strategies (using eco friendly materials) to market their products? Could it be seen as how the destinations' sustainable image reflects on sustainable effectiveness of the destination itself? This note points out that the destination should have a sustainable image and indicate an ideology for further research, which would add value to this arena. Strategic thinking and adopting such practices would help the thereof to address this inquiry.

### ***Culture and Sustainability***

Culture and tourism blends are the most sought after arena in destination branding research. Chavan and Bhola (2014) pointed out in their review that sustainable tourism would facilitate to cultivate cultural integrity. Ng et al. (2007) identified four critical elements of culture that can be seen in tourism studies as the influencers of tourists' destination choice behavior. Those are:

- ↪ **Tourists' National Culture** : Tourists' home culture or the culture that exists in tourist nations.
- ↪ **Tourists' Individual Level Culture** : Characterized as intramural culture formed by the growing environment of an individual say family, norms, rituals, and beliefs.
- ↪ **Destination's Culture** : The culture that exists in a tourism destination or the culture that the destination reflects on (for example : the destination has an image of sustainability).
- ↪ **Culture Distance** : The rift that exists between the destination's culture and tourist's nation culture – in other words, the cultural distance.

This study intended to understand the influence of culture on the tourists' behavior and intention to choose and visit. The inferences by Ng et al. (2007) indicated the importance of culture in tourism studies. Here exists an opportunity to study the sustainability perspectives with reference to all the four elements of culture proposed by Ng et al. (2007). For example, when cultural elements have been provided with due emphasis to understand tourists, there comes a quest – would culture as a factor have significance with destinations' sustainable development or tourists' adoption of sustainable acts? Does tourists' national culture or individual culture (or the components of culture) play a vital role on their perception towards sustainability? Though many studies exist on culture and tourism, scanty works are seen together sustainability and culture. Similarly, there is a need for research prominence to understand whether the destination's culture itself inculcates sustainable cues or could marketing efforts colliding and portraying a sustainable culture in the communication channels significantly impact the tourists' sustainable behavior? However, it is critical to understand the cultural distance between tourists' culture and destinations' sustainable culture. The fifth note indicates that research lacks evidence from the perspectives that blend culture and sustainability in depth.

## ***Rural Destinations and Sustainability***

One of the most effective types of tourism that segments tourists, who have motives such as exploring the unusual, escaping crowd, and skipping city life etc., is rural tourism. Sustainability in rural tourism is often a probing factor because there are two sides. One is when the rural tourism gains attraction, the local economies get a boost, the destination's residents or stakeholders' standard of life elevates, and overall, the country's image gets noticed. Ramakrishna (2011) pointed out about the rural tourism's potential in the tourism industry. However, on the other side, when the tourism attributes create vibrancy in the rural destination, a threat to the natural environment and ecology pops out. This proposition derives the need to think on two perspectives – Do sustainability initiatives in rural tourism destinations have strategic challenges for the marketers and compelling effect on policies that justifies both the sides ? ; Is accelerating urbanization a threat or opportunity for enhancement of rural tourism? Villanueva-Álvaro et al. (2017) studied about the rural establishments and their impact on the sustainability. The research work focused on the internal perspective (supply). This has triggered to understand whether those increasing infrastructure or establishments in rural destinations impact the tourists' sustainability perception or behavior? Thus, it has been indicated to note and think about the optimized growth or rural destinations and sustainability of the same.

## **Implications**

This research note has indicated six key perspectives of destination sustainability that need further research executions and industrial deliveries. The highlighted aspects – such as concentrating on the social perspectives in sustainability, creating awareness on local consumptions that contribute to local communities and so as to the destinations' sustainability ; tourists' individual responsibility and destinations' responsible behavior towards sustainability ; the role of destinations' culture in sustainability ; and the need for optimizing the rural economic growth and rural tourism sustainability – not only conceive new academic research ideologies but also significantly signal marketers, policy makers, and authorities to ponder more on the perspectives of sustainability for efficient destination management in India.

## **Conclusion**

This research note has been prepared for the benefit of academic research in tourism destination sustainability and tourism industry. Sustainability, being one of the most essential focuses of all the corporates, requires more strategic approaches from the governance level to enhance the bestowed resources and environment for future world. Particularly, sustainability in Indian tourism plays a vital role as the natural resources are apparently tourism products that determine the social, economic, and environment growth of various regions of India.

The inferences drawn in this research note are based on previous findings in research related to the sustainability of tourism destinations and on my ideologies for further research. The indicated paradigms, if employed on the destinations, would help marketers, governments, and other stakeholders for effective destination management.

## **Author's Contribution**

This research note has been prepared by Dr. Sabari Shankar R. based on the readings from literature.

## Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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### **About the Author**

**Dr. Sabari Shankar R. works as an Assistant Professor of Management in Department of Professional Studies, Christ University, Bangalore. He has worked with IIM Bangalore and IIM Kozhikode. He is a doctorate in management from a reputed state university in India.**