



## Does Awareness Shape Tourism Experiences: A Study on Sustainable Tourism Practices in Valparai

S Pavithra<sup>1\*</sup>, S Shanmugapriya<sup>2</sup>

Nallamuthu Gounder Mahalingam College, Pollachi

Corresponding Author: S Pavithra [ajayca1994@gmail.com](mailto:ajayca1994@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to discover tourist awareness, socio-economic characteristics, and tourism practices in Valparai, particularly focusing on the incorporation of sustainable tourism principles. By utilizing primary data collected from 50 participants through a purposive sampling method, this study applies reliability analysis, straightforward percentage calculations, weighted averages, and chi-square tests for data interpretation. The results indicate that tourist awareness significantly impacts travel behaviors, intentions to return, and engagement in environmentally-conscious practices. The findings suggest that improved tourism marketing, infrastructural enhancements, and community-oriented eco-tourism initiatives could elevate Valparai's appeal as a sustainable tourist destination. This research contributes to policy discussions by providing valuable insights for tourism stakeholders, local businesses, government entities, and others, aimed at developing responsible tourism strategies

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is a significant driver of socio-economic development, contributing substantially to local economies and communities. It is one of the largest global industries, accounting for 10.4% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Zhu et al., 2020). While tourism stimulates economic growth across various sectors, it also has considerable environmental implications. The industry is known for high energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, with affluent nations contributing a major share. However, India ranks fourth globally in terms of tourism-related carbon footprint, further exacerbated by challenges in its energy sector (Chawla et al., 2020). The correlation between energy consumption, tourism activities, and emissions underscores the urgency of promoting sustainable tourism practices in the Indian context (Jayasinghe & Selvanathan, 2021).

Tamil Nadu plays a crucial role in India's tourism landscape, ranking as the second most significant state in terms of tourism, with an annual growth rate of 16% (Iniyan, 2015). Recognizing the importance of sustainable tourism, the Tamil Nadu Tourism Policy focuses on increasing revenue for the local economy, supporting local communities, and promoting environmentally responsible tourism. The policy aims to establish a sustainable tourism ecosystem while ensuring a safe and high-quality experience for visitors. Various initiatives, including tourism exhibitions, conferences, and cultural festivals, contribute to enhancing the tourism sector by promoting heritage, traditional crafts, and local cuisine. Additionally, the State Department of Archaeology actively works toward preserving Tamil Nadu's historical monuments, reflecting the state's commitment to cultural conservation (Iniyan, 2015).

One of Tamil Nadu's emerging tourist destinations is Valparai, located in the Anamalai Hills of the Western Ghats. Surrounded by mountains and forests, Valparai is renowned for its rich biodiversity, biosphere reserves, national parks, and picturesque landscapes that attract nature enthusiasts and photographers (Umamaheswari et al., 2024). With its lush tea plantations, coffee estates, and scenic routes featuring hairpin bends, Valparai has established itself as a preferred destination for eco-tourists. Given its abundant natural attractions, there is potential to further develop Valparai as a sustainable tourism hub through initiatives such as summer festivals and conservation-focused tourism programs.

Despite the recognized importance of sustainable tourism, there remains a gap in understanding how factors such as tourist awareness, environmental education, and sustainable tourism management influence visitor preferences and revisit intentions in destinations like Valparai. Examining these aspects is essential for developing effective strategies that balance tourism growth with ecological conservation while enhancing visitor satisfaction. This study aims to explore tourist attitudes toward destination awareness and tourism practices in Valparai, providing insights into how sustainable tourism can be effectively integrated into the region's tourism development framework.

The rest of the paper is laid out: Section 2 review of literature. Section 3 deals with statement of the problem, Scope of the study dealt in section 4, data base and research methodology dealt in section 5, section 6 is the limitation of the study and at the end section 7, the conclusion.

## LITERATURE RIVIEW

Tourism plays a vital role in economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Various studies have explored the factors influencing tourist behavior, satisfaction, and revisit intentions, highlighting the importance of awareness, experience, and infrastructure in shaping tourism development. One of the key debates in tourism research revolves around the relationship between environmental consciousness and revisit intentions. Hashim et al. (2013) found that there was no significant relationship between attitudes toward green practices and the likelihood of tourists revisiting a destination. This suggests that while tourists may support sustainability in principle, their decision to return depends on other factors beyond environmental responsibility. In contrast, Pahari (2024) emphasized that positive interactions and a strong destination image play a crucial role in

building trust, which significantly influences pro-tourism intentions. This indicates that emotional and experiential aspects, such as hospitality and memorable experiences, are more effective in encouraging revisits than environmental concerns alone.

Beyond attitude and trust, tourist awareness also plays a significant role in shaping perceptions and influencing tourism patterns. Chandran and Bhattacharya (2023) highlighted that awareness and attitudes toward ecotourism and conservation in Munnar were strongly associated, suggesting that well-informed tourists are more likely to engage with sustainable tourism initiatives. Rajamohan and Sundar (2016) further reinforced this idea by stating that tourist awareness has a multiplier effect on economic growth and directly impacts tourism development in a region. This means that increasing awareness not only benefits conservation efforts but also enhances the economic potential of tourism destinations.

However, awareness alone is not enough if tourists are not exposed to diverse tourism opportunities. A study by Vennila Gopal and Gayathri Devi (2023) found that respondents in Coimbatore had only moderate awareness of specific tourism segments such as medical tourism, cruise tourism, and sports tourism. The study suggested that these tourism forms need more promotion among the public to reach their full potential. This aligns with previous research highlighting the role of marketing and awareness campaigns in shaping tourism preferences and choices.

While awareness and perception are critical, factors such as accessibility, environmental quality, and facilities directly influence tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions. Fatmawati and Olga (2023) examined natural-based tourism destinations and found that environmental quality, attractiveness, accessibility, and available facilities positively impact tourist satisfaction, which in turn

enhances the likelihood of tourists revisiting a destination. Similarly, Latha and Gomathi (2019) studied hill stations in Tamil Nadu and found that tourists were primarily attracted by the calm, cool, and serene environments, as well as the scenic beauty. This highlights the importance of natural appeal and well-maintained tourism infrastructure in ensuring visitor satisfaction.

Despite these factors, tourism development cannot thrive without strong government support and infrastructural improvements. Sundararajan and Vimala (2024) emphasized that for tourism to contribute significantly to economic growth in Tamil Nadu, the government must take proactive measures. Their study suggested introducing special tourist trains, improving highway connectivity to heritage sites, and ensuring clean and affordable accommodation. These initiatives are essential for enhancing accessibility and making tourism more appealing to a broader audience. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the analysis the socio-economic profile of the respondent and their habit travel and find awareness level of various tourist spots in Valparai.

### **Statement of Problem**

Tourism development in Valparai requires a comprehensive understanding of visitor demographics, travel patterns, and destination awareness. Despite Valparai's tourism potential, there is limited research examining the relationship between tourists' socio-economic backgrounds and their travel behaviors, as well as their awareness of local attractions. This knowledge gap hampers effective tourism planning and marketing strategies. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing targeted tourism initiatives and improving the overall tourism experience in Valparai.

### **Scope of the study**

This research focuses on analyzing tourism patterns and visitor awareness in Valparai and its surrounding tourist destinations, encompassing both natural sites and cultural landmarks. This study helps to the Stakeholders, who involved include tourism businesses (hotels, tour operators, etc.), local communities, government agencies responsible for tourism regulation and education, and educational institutions delivering tourism-related programs. The study will focus on provide context-specific findings relevant to these stakeholders, which would help stakeholders of this sector utilize the findings to increase the tourism footfalls and development of this destination.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Base and Research Methodology**

This study uses to identify socio-economic profile and current tourism practice of tourist and the awareness of tourist spots in Valparai and its surrounding areas. The study uses a descriptive research design, which is suitable for learning about the traits, actions, and awareness patterns of visitors in a natural environment such as Valparai. A structured interview schedule was used to gather primary data from 50 visitors to Valparai. Information on demographics (age, gender, education, marital status, etc.), travel habits (such as mode of transportation, reason for visiting, and frequency), and awareness of local tourist sites were all intended to be gathered by the questions. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants. In order to guarantee that data were

collected from people who were available and had firsthand knowledge of Valparai tourism, this non-probability sampling technique was selected. This approach is particularly helpful in location-specific and exploratory research when inclusion requires certain attributes (such as visiting the site as a visitor). To increase the depth (as opposed to breadth) of understanding, a qualitative study may use a very small and purposefully chosen sample (Miles and Huberman, 1994) (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling is a technique for discovering and choosing situations that will make efficient use of scarce research resources (Palinkas et al., 2015) and is "used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (Kelly, 2010: 317).

In order to ensure relevance, context-rich data, and compatibility with the research purpose of analyzing awareness and tourism behavior in a geographically unique location, 50 respondents who were actively exploring Valparai were chosen for this study. The gathered data was processed using SPSS software and examined using the proper statistical methods to guarantee a solid study. These included chi-square tests to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic factors and tourist awareness, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) to assess the internal consistency of the awareness scale, and descriptive statistics (weighted averages and simple percentages) to summarize tourist characteristics and awareness levels. The goal of using this methodology, which combines structured interviews, purposeful sampling, and both descriptive and inferential techniques, was to produce data-driven insights on the ways that demographic traits affect traveler behavior and awareness patterns. This strategy is in line with earlier tourism studies that evaluated visitor views and awareness using comparable techniques (Rajamohan & Sundar, 2016; Chandran & Bhattacharya, 2023). On the coming session we will discuss analysis part in detail such as reliability test, simple percentage and weighted average method and chi-square test.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Reliability Test**

Cronbach's alpha reliability (Cronbach, 1951) is one of the most widely used measures of reliability in the social and organizational sciences. When the measurements represent multiple questionnaire/test items, which is the most common application, Cronbach's alpha is referred to as a measure of "internal consistency" reliability (Bonett and Wright, 2014). The result shows that Cronbach's Alpha of .922 for the awareness scale indicates that the scale has excellent internal consistency. This means that the items in the scale are highly correlated with each other, suggesting that they are measuring the same underlying construct, which is awareness.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

After the survey questions were determined, the analysis phase of the findings was started with the help of the SPSS Program. The findings on Socio-economic Profile of the Respondents are presented in Table 1. In Table 2 presents tourist current tourism practice.

Table 1. Socio- Economic Profile of the Respondents

Socio-Economic Profile	Sub Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 22	11	22
	23 to 45	29	58
	Above 46	10	20
Gender	Male	28	56
	Female	22	44
Area of Residence	Village	3	6
	Town	7	14
	City	40	80
Educational Qualification	Illiterate	2	4
	Up to HSC	7	14
	Under Graduate	8	16
	Post Graduate	26	52
	Professional	4	8
	Others	3	6
Marital Status	Married	35	70
	Unmarried	15	30
Family Type	Joint Family	24	48
	Nuclear Family	26	52

It is observed that 56% (28 people) of the respondents were male, while 44% (22 people) were female. The vast majority of the respondents, 70% (35 people), were married individuals, while 30% (15 people) were unmarried. In terms of age, 22% (11 people) of the respondents were below 22 years old, 58% (29 people) were between 23 and 45 years old, and 20% (10 people) were 46 years old or above. The majority of the respondents, 80% (40 people), resided in cities, while 14% (7 people) resided in towns and 6% (3 people) resided in villages.

When the education levels of the individuals included in the sample are examined, it is observed that the majority, 52% (26 people), of respondents were post-graduates, followed by 16% (8 people) who were under-graduates, 14% (7 people) who had education up to HSC, and 4% (2 people) who were illiterate. Additionally, 8% (4 people) of the respondents had professional qualifications, and 6% (3 people) had other qualifications. In terms of family type, 52% (26 people) of the respondents had nuclear families, while 48% (24 people) had joint families. The findings suggest that the respondents were predominantly male, married, and residing in cities, with a high level of education and a mix of nuclear and joint families.

Table 2. Tourist Current Tourism Practice in Valparai

Tourist Habit	Category	Frequency	Valid (%)
State	With in Tamilnadu	35	70
	Other than Tamilnadu	15	30
District	Coimbatore	10	20
	Other than Coimbatore	40	80
Number of Visits (Last Year)	Up to 5 times	47	94
	More than 5 times	3	6
Members Accompanied	Family Members	38	76
	Friends/Colleague	10	20
	Agencies travel group	2	4
No of Members Accompanied	Up to 10 Members	44	88
	More than 10 Members	6	12
Tour Organizer	Self	21	42
	Group	25	50
	Tour operator/Agencies	4	8
Mode of Transport	Roda way	49	98
	Road way and Rail way	1	2
Type of Vehicle Used	Own vehicle	32	64
	Private Vehicle	8	16
	Public Transport	5	10
	Tour	5	10
Reason for Choosing Transport Mode	Only mode available	4	8
	Convenience	38	76
	Economy	1	2
	Group decision	7	14

The findings regarding the travel habits of the individuals who answered the questionnaire are shown in Table2. The majority of the participants (70%) of tourist came from Tamilnadu, while 30% of tourist came from other than Tamilnadu. In terms of district, 20% of the participants are from Coimbatore district, while 80% are from other than Coimbatore district. The vast majority of the participants (76%) travel with family members, while 20% travel with friends or colleagues, and 4% travel with agencies or tour groups. When it comes to organizing their tours, 42% of the participants prefer to organize their tours themselves, while 50% of people discuss and make decision with group member, and 8% prefer to use tour operators or agencies.

The majority of the participants (98%) prefer to use roadways as their mode of transport, while 2% use a combination of roadways and railways. In terms of the type of vehicle used to reach the destination, 64% of the participants use their own vehicles, while 16% use private vehicles, 10% use public transport, and 10% use tour operators' or agencies' vehicles. The majority of the participants (76%) choose their transport mode based on convenience, while 8% choose based on availability, 2% choose based on economy, and 14% choose based on group decision. In terms of the number of visits made in the last one year, 94% of the participants have visited up to 5 times, while 6% have visited more than 5 times.

The answers of the participants to nominal questions regarding their travel habits were subjected to frequency analysis. The results show that the participants have the higher number of travelers came from within Tamilnadu, travel with family members, and using roadways as their mode of transport. They also prefer to organize their tours themselves and use their own vehicles to reach the destination. The findings suggest that convenience is the most important factor in choosing a transport mode, and the majority of the participants have visited up to 5 times in the last one year.

Table 3. Awareness of Tourist Spots

S. No	Tourist Spots	HA	A	N	NA	SN A	Mea n	Std. dev	Decision
1	Aliyar	41 (82 )	7 (14 )	2 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4.78	.507	HA
2	Kavi Falls (Monkey Falls)	26 (52 )	15 (30 )	7 (14 )	1 (2)	1 (2)	4.28	.927	HA
3	Topslip	23 (46 )	23 (46 )	1 (2)	3 (6)	0 (0)	4.32	.794	HA
4	Varagaliar elephant camp in ATR	11 (22 )	12 (24 )	17 (34 )	8 (16 )	2 (4)	3.44	1.128	Low Awareness
5	Anamalayaga m	8 (16 )	12 (24 )	15 (30 )	14 (28 )	1 (2)	3.24	1.098	Low Awareness
6	Attakatti view point	15 (30 )	20 (40 )	6 (12 )	9 (18 )	1 (2)	3.82	1.063	HA
7	Balaji Temple	22 (44 )	7 (14 )	7 (14 )	14 (28 )	0 (0)	3.74	1.291	HA
8	Birala Waterfalls	10 (20 )	17 (34 )	7 (14 )	14 (28 )	2 (4)	3.38	1.210	Low Awareness
9	Chinnakallar Falls	10 (20 )	14 (28 )	11 (22 )	12 (24 )	3 (6)	3.32	1.220	Low Awareness
10	Grass Hills National Park	8 (16 )	17 (34 )	13 (26 )	8 (16 )	4 (8)	3.34	1.171	Low Awareness
11	Koolangal River	15 (30 )	17 (34 )	7 (14 )	9 (18 )	2 (4)	3.68	1.203	HA
12	Loam's View Point	7 (14 )	15 (30 )	10 (20 )	15 (30 )	3 (6)	3.16	1.184	Low Awareness
13	Nallamudi View Point	8 (16 )	15 (30 )	10 (20 )	15 (30 )	2 (4)	3.24	1.170	Low Awareness
14	Navamalai	12 (24 )	15 (30 )	8 (16 )	11 (22 )	4 (8)	3.40	1.294	Low Awareness

15	Nirar Dam	8 (16 )	15 (30 )	12 (24 )	14 (28 )	1 (2)	3.30	1.111	Low Awareness
16	Pancha Mughha Vinayagar Koil	10 (20 )	13 (26 )	13 (26 )	11 (22 )	3 (6)	3.32	1.203	Low Awareness
17	Sholayar Dam	21 (42 )	14 (28 )	7 (14 )	7 (14 )	1 (2)	3.94	1.150	Highly Aware
18	Thalananar waterfalls	9 (18 )	14 (28 )	14 (28 )	8 (16 )	5 (10)	3.28	1.230	Low Awareness
19	Tea estates	24 (48 )	13 (26 )	3 (6)	7 (14 )	3 (6)	3.96	1.293	HA
20	Velankanni Church in Valparai	15 (30 )	16 (32 )	7 (14 )	8 (16 )	4 (8)	3.60	1.292	Low Awareness

Note: (HA- Highly Aware, A- Aware, N- Neutral, NA- Not Aware, HNA- Highly Not Aware, N=50, Weighted Average = 3.627)

The data analysis shows that 8 tourist spots was "Highly Aware" among the tourist and other 12 tourist spots such as Varagaliar elephant camp in ATR, Anamalayagam, Biral Waterfalls, Chinnakallar Falls, Grass Hills National Park, Loam's View Point, Nallamudi View Point, Navamalai, Nirar Dam, Pancha Mughha Vinayagar Koil, Thalananar waterfalls and Velankanni Church in Valparai show "Low Awareness" status among the tourist. This indicates those places need more attention in terms of promotion and awareness for those places.

Table 4. Chi-Square Test

Variables	$\chi^2$	Df	P-Value	Decision
Age	25.720	10	.004	Associated
Gender	12.382	5	.030	Associated
Area of Residence	4.067	10	.944	Not associated
Education Qualification	23.85	25	.528	Not associated
Marital Status	7.866	5	.164	Not associated
Family Type	11.098	5	.049	Associated
Occupation	39.087	30	.124	Not associated

Table 4 presents the results of a Chi-square test conducted to examine the relationship between the primary reason for being unaware of certain spots and the socio-economic profile of the respondent. The results of the Chi-square test

indicate that age, gender, and family type are associated with the primary reason for being unaware of certain spots, while area of residence, education qualification, marital status, and occupation are not associated. These findings can help tourism destinations and businesses to develop targeted marketing strategies that cater to the needs and preferences of different demographic groups.

Table 5. Source of Awareness of Tourist Spot

Source of Awareness of tourist spot	Yes (in	No (in
Friends/Family Members	94	6
Official websites of destination	38	62
Travel agents	36	64
TV/Radio/Newspaper	60	40
Social media site (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Blogs)	88	12

The data indicates that word-of-mouth recommendations play a crucial role in creating awareness about Valparai, with 94% of tourists learning about the destination through friends and family members, making it the most influential source. Social media platforms (88%), such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and blogs, also serve as a powerful tool in tourism promotion, highlighting the growing significance of digital marketing. Traditional media (TV, radio, and newspapers) contribute to 60% of awareness, demonstrating a moderate influence. However, official destination websites (38%) and travel agents (36%) are less preferred sources, suggesting that tourists rely more on personal networks and online platforms rather than formal promotional channels. This emphasizes the need for stronger digital engagement strategies and leveraging word-of-mouth marketing to effectively boost tourism awareness in Valparai.

**Limitation of the Study**

The research encountered several notable limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. The relatively small sample size of 50 respondents placed limitations on the study and may not have accurately represented all of the visitors to Valparai. Another significant constraint was the temporal nature of data collection, which was conducted at a specific point in time and did not account for seasonal variations in tourist patterns. These limitations suggest opportunities for future research, which could benefit from larger sample sizes and more comprehensive analytical approaches to provide a more complete understanding of tourism patterns in Valparai.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study of tourist awareness in Valparai reveals significant insights into visitor patterns and destination recognition. The study indicating a need for enhanced promotion of lesser-known attractions. The demographic analysis showed that visitors are predominantly well-educated urban males, with convenience being their primary consideration in travel planning. The study

findings recommended that tourism stakeholders develop targeted marketing strategies to promote Valparai's attractions, leveraging the power of personal recommendations, social media, and traditional media to reach potential visitors and enhance their awareness of the destination.

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