

# ROLE OF CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN SHAPING KERALA'S INTERNATIONAL TOURISM: EVIDENCES FROM THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

*Thematic analysis was conducted using transcripts derived from 28 in-depth stakeholder interviews conducted in the top four foreign tourist destinations in Kerala. The objective of this study was to analyse the cultural and psychological factors underlying the tourism destinations and international tourism of Kerala. It is expected to provide insights for enhancing the effectiveness of tourism regulation and management. It is observed that certain factors such as destination's safety features, repeat visits, prevalence of culinary tourism and the cultural preferences of European tourists had a positive and widespread impact on tourism in Kerala. At the same time, certain behavioural issues such as poor waste management, noise pollution, and overcrowding, had a common negative effect on international tourism in Kerala. Additionally, instances of cheating and misbehaviour against foreign tourists in these destinations have tarnished the overall visitor experience and negatively impacted arrivals. In summary, our qualitative analysis sheds light on the intricate relationship between cultural and psychological factors and their influence on international tourism in Kerala.*

**Keywords:** *thematic analysis, cultural and psychological factors, Kerala's international tourism, behavioural issues*

**JEL Classification:** *L83, M14, Q01*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Kerala became the first Indian state to officially recognize tourism as an industry in 1986 due to its significant contributions to the state economy in terms of employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and economic growth (Nair & Dhanuraj, 2018). Tourism, being a labour-intensive industry, directly employs 1.5 million people in the state, according to data from the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala (2020). Foreign exchange earnings from tourism exceeded \$15,000 million in the pre-Covid year 2019, and the tourism industry accounted for 10 percent of the state's income in 2018-19, as reported in 'Kerala Tourism Statistics' published by the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala (2020). In this context, it is important to analyse the factors associated with Kerala's international tourism. Tourism, both in general and international tourism in particular, is influenced by various factors, including the destination's cultural uniqueness and the perception-based features of tourists.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The cultural aspects of a destination can contribute to the development of tourism, along with other factors such as natural resources, human resources, historical assets, and infrastructure (Heath & Wall, 1992; Bunghez, 2016). Due to differences in

perceptions and preferences, people from different countries and cultures prioritize various tourism products differently (Kozak, 2002; Celik & Dedeoglu, 2019).

Cultural distance or differences between the destination and source countries can impact tourism in different ways. According to McKercher and du Cros (2003), people often visit destinations that share cultural similarities with their home markets. However, as pointed out by Plog (1974), there are situations in which people choose culturally different destinations. This suggests that both cultural similarity and cultural differences can positively affect tourism demand on different occasions. Cheung and Saha (2015) assert that cultural similarity in terms of language and religion can attract tourist arrivals, highlighting the close link between these factors. However, cultural tourism is an inclusive term that encompasses both cultural similarity and cultural distance, as it primarily involves visits to cultural attractions and events by culturally motivated individuals (Richards, 2014). Since visitors from advanced economies in Europe and North America dominate the total visitor arrivals in the state, cultural distance has evidently positively impacted Kerala's inbound international tourism.

Psychological elements of tourism, such as novelty, involvement, and social interaction, have a positive effect on creating memorable tourism experiences (Wei et al., 2019). This implies that the better the experience, the higher the likelihood of revisiting the destination and vice versa. Visitor

satisfaction, destination safety, the novelty of tourism products, and past experiences have all been identified as motivations for repeat visits in various studies (Hui et al., 2007; Jang & Fen, 2007; Kozak, 2001 and Som & Badarneh, 2011).

The present study emphasizes cultural and psychological factors related to Kerala's international tourism. This is significant because most studies on tourism demand have focused on standard economic determinants, such as tourism prices and tourists' income, as pointed out by Liu et al. (2021). Examples of such studies include Song et al. (2003), Kim et al. (2011), Naude & Saayman (2005), Garau-Vadell & De-Juar-Vigaray (2017), Narayan (2004), Malec & Abrham (2016), and Alegre & Pou (2004). Both economic and non-economic factors may drive tourism development in a destination. In a study by Salman et al. (2021), key themes included environmental protection, cultural conservation, economic support, and activities, awareness, and empowerment. Themes may vary depending on the nature of the study. In a study on medical tourism, Alvarez et al. (2011) identified several themes or coding categories, including data, country regulations, the role of government, diaspora, and local involvement. The present study categorizes codes or organizing themes under several global themes, which are detailed in the forthcoming sections.

Both problem-wise and methodology-wise papers were reviewed. It was identified that the papers in tourism economics attempting the cultural and psychological aspects were not very common unlike economic factors driving tourism demand. Moreover, thematic papers solely prepared for analysing cultural and psychological factors of international tourism were also limited. It contributes qualitative treatment, exclusively on the role of cultural and psychological factors in driving international tourism, to the tourism economics literature.

### **III. OBJECTIVES**

The study aims to analyse features and issues associated with cultural and psychological factors of Kerala's international tourism. The nature and intensity of the factors will be treated qualitatively. The study prefers to suggest how to make Kerala's international tourism management more effective.

### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

Thematic analysis was employed as part of the qualitative research conducted on Kerala's international tourism, following the methodology used by Amoako et al. (2021), Alvarez et al. (2011), Salman et al. (2021), Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2013), and Yuksel et al. (1999). To conduct this qualitative

analysis of foreign tourist arrivals in Kerala, we conducted 28 in-depth stakeholder interviews in the top four destinations for foreign tourists in the Indian state of Kerala, with the exception of the city destinations of Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. These city destinations were intentionally omitted due to the challenge of pinpointing specific locations for foreign tourist arrivals within large urban areas.

The sample size of 28 respondents was purposefully selected and deemed sufficient for stakeholder analysis, reaching a saturation level where new insights became limited. All 28 stakeholders are highly experienced, knowledgeable, and actively involved in their respective fields. Among the stakeholders, 4 were from Fort Kochi, 8 from Kovalam, 8 from Varkala, 7 from Alappuzha, and one is a government official in the Kerala tourism department (see Table 1). The stakeholders across these four destinations encompass a range of roles, including auto/taxi drivers, accommodation providers (hotels/homestays/resorts), local residents and shop owners, restaurant and tea shop owners, destination-based employees (such as boat owners, tour guides, and lifeguards), foreign tourists, and government employees in the tourism department. The number of respondents from each destination was determined to be sufficient for identifying a maximum number of themes related to foreign tourist arrivals. The total sample size and sample size from each destination were fixed based on the concept of data saturation, as adopted by Amoako et al. (2021), Faulkner & Trotter (2017), and Fush & Ness (2015).

Semi-structured questionnaires were utilised to collect data during these stakeholder interviews. Each interview, lasting approximately 30-40 minutes, was recorded with the verbal permission of the participants and subsequently transcribed into English. Among the overall broad themes identified from each interview transcript, relevant codes (related to cultural and psychological factors) were extracted for the present analysis. Stakeholders who are directly involved in the tourism sector of a destination, possessing substantial knowledge and practical experience, can be categorized into various groups, as identified by Amoako et al. (2021). These groups include employees, government representatives, the local society (natives), and the private sector. Each stakeholder group plays a significant role in its own capacity. According to Amoako et al. (2021), destinations tend to attract more tourists when employees and local residents in the tourism destination collectively ensure that the destination is clean, safe, and welcoming. The government, in its role as a regulator and facilitator of tourism, also plays a crucial role in developing tourism infrastructure and providing financial support, among other responsibilities.

Table 1. Details of stakeholders

Stakeholder No.	Category	Destination	Age	Gender
1	Auto/Taxi	Alappuzha	53	Male
2	Other destination job-boat	Alappuzha	44	Male
3	Other destination job-boat	Alappuzha	31	Male
4	Accommodation unit-homestay	Alappuzha	62	Male
5	Accommodation unit-homestay	Alappuzha	46	Male
6	Native/Native shop owner	Alappuzha	46	Male
7	Restaurant	Alappuzha	38	Male
8	Native/Native shop owner	Fort Kochi	39	Male
9	Accommodation unit-homestay	Fort Kochi	53	Female
10	Accommodation unit-homestay	Fort Kochi	32	Male
11	Native/Native shop owner	Fort Kochi	41	Male
12	Government-Tourism Department (Kerala)	Other*	40	Male
13	Auto/Taxi	Kovalam-Poovar	37	Male
14	Native/Native shop owner	Kovalam-Poovar	52	Male
15	Restaurant	Kovalam-Poovar	43	Male
16	Restaurant	Kovalam-Poovar	57	Male
17	Native/Native shop owner	Kovalam-Poovar	44	Male
18	Auto/taxi	Kovalam-Poovar	36	Male
19	Other destination job-boat	Kovalam-Poovar	58	Male
20	Native	Kovalam-Poovar	22	Male
21	Other destination job-life guard	Varkala	42	Male
22	Accommodation unit-resort	Varkala	28	Male
23	Native/Native shop owner	Varkala	56	Male
24	Other destination job-tour guide	Varkala	48	Male
25	Foreign tourist (from the US)	Varkala	34	Female
26	Foreign tourist (from Germany)	Varkala	77	Male
27	Foreign tourist (from Russia)	Varkala	65	Female
28	Foreign tourist (from Italy)	Varkala	74	Female

Source: Transcripts of stakeholder interviews

\*Tourism Department, Government of Kerala

## V. RESULT & DISCUSSION ON CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF KERALA'S INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

The codes identified within the cultural and psychological factors of Kerala's international tourism can be broadly categorized as either positively or negatively associated with the tourism sector (see Table 2). Notably, six organizing themes stand out as highly relevant, with 14 or more responses out of a total of 28. These include issues such as poor waste management, arrivals driven by leisure, repeat visits, and the allure of culinary tourism. Additionally, factors like being disturbed by noise and overcrowding and the creation of a safe and friendly atmosphere play pivotal roles in shaping the tourist experience. Furthermore, aspects like travel planning, the enthusiasm of European tourists, the dual role of language as both an advantage and barrier, the significance of special events and effective policing, the appeal of experiencing the destination's culture and village life, trust-building initiatives, and the appeal of beach-side stays all emerged as relevant factors within this broader theme. These findings provide valuable insights into the multifaceted cultural and psychological factors that influence Kerala's international tourism, thereby offering a foundation for further analysis and potential improvements within the tourism sector.

### Destination's Safety Features

According to 14 stakeholders, destinations are almost free from abuses and assaults on foreign tourists while the rest stakeholders did not mention about destination's safety (see Table 2). Natives are accommodative and friendly as per the words by many stakeholders including foreign tourists. Stakeholders, however, accept that there could be isolated instances of misbehaviour against foreign tourists. A Russian lady from Varkala beach says, *"I like Indian people. They are very positive and always smiling. In this difficult time, the Indians treat the Russians well. I haven't seen anything negative from them. The Kerala police effectively intervene for the tourists. We are not stressed by anything and do not bring any difficulties. I really like that there are women's police here. I feel safe in Kerala"*. According to a backwater tour packager in Alappuzha, *"There are only isolated incidents of bad behaviour from natives on foreign tourists. Everywhere there will be a few people misbehaving to others. We cannot generalise it on that basis. Police interfere effectively in such situations. They won't have to face other issues"*. Although 14 stakeholders argued Kerala's destinations are mostly safe and people are friendly, there are a few stakeholders including a foreign tourist who mentioned non-friendly behaviour of the people and unsafe nature of the destinations. A senior Italian lady in Varkala beach says, *"I had a few bitter experiences of burglary in some destinations of India and Mexico"*. However,

in light of 14 responses of safety and only a couple responses of safety issues, we can conclude that Kerala's destinations are mostly safe and people are generally friendly.

The safety of tourist destinations has demonstrated a significant impact on international tourism, a notion supported by Vadell & De-Juar-Vigaray (2017) and Ayob & Masron (2014). Notably, fourteen stakeholders have emphasized that destinations in Kerala maintain a high level of safety and are relatively free from instances of misbehaviour towards tourists. This commendable safety record can be attributed to effective policing, a point underscored by ten stakeholders. However, the stringent enforcement of security measures, combined with various other factors, has had a negative impact on tourist arrivals in Kovalam. It's worth noting that foreign tourist arrivals in Kovalam had already been declining before the onset of the Covid pandemic. The local residents in these destinations are acutely aware of the importance of ensuring the safety of tourists, particularly international visitors, recognizing that any blemish on the region's safety reputation could significantly dampen tourism demand and disrupt the earnings derived from tourism. Consequently, it is the collective duty of all stakeholders to preserve and uphold the tourist-friendly reputation of these destinations.

#### **Travel Culture of the Europeans**

According to 12 stakeholders, every foreign tourist has their own travel plan while they arrive in the destination (see Table 2). They do only whatever they want to do. Mostly, they have a fixed budget as well across the stay duration. They won't blindly trust destination's people to spend money for various tourism-related goods and services. According to a homestay owner in Fort Kochi, *"foreign tourists have a fixed budget to spend in a year. They will spend the entire amount of money as per their schedule and budget"*. A tour guide in Varkala responds *"foreign tourists always have a time table. They have a planning of what to see and how much to spend. They plan to spend a fixed amount of money every day. When they spend higher for a thing, they give up some other spending to balance their budget. When they drink tender coconut, they give up Pepsi, for example. They know how much to spend for room a day and what to eat"*. Both responses imply that foreign tourists who arrive in Kerala (especially from Europe) follow a strict travel plan. They'll manage their proposed expenses and make sure that their foreign travel is competitive.

Foreign tourists overwhelmingly arrive in Kerala for enjoying holidays as per the stakeholder analysis employed as part of this study. According to backwater tour packager in Alappuzha, *"foreign tourists are here to enjoy their vacation and relieve from their busy life"*. According to an official from the tourism department of Kerala, the primary intention of foreign tourists visiting the region is focused on leisure and recreation. A United States tourist in Varkala says,

*"I love beaches. I love swimming. I want to relax in my vacation"*. Eighteen out of the twenty-eight stakeholders share the same opinion, aligning with the notion that the primary intention of foreign tourists in Kerala is centred around leisure and recreation.

The majority of foreign tourists arriving in Kerala hail from European countries, as echoed by 11 stakeholders. Europeans exhibit a remarkable inclination to explore the world, even at a younger age, as emphasized by these stakeholders. This travel mania, or an extraordinary impulse to travel among Europeans, significantly influences tourist arrivals in the state as pointed out by stakeholders. In addition, the manner in which Europeans plan their travels follows a distinct pattern when it comes to spending. Twelve stakeholders observed that they typically adhere to a fixed budget for their travels, resisting external pressures to purchase tourism products unless genuine trust has been established. They meticulously stick to their itineraries and budgets, ensuring that their daily expenditures do not compromise their overall budget during their stay in Kerala's destinations.

This understanding of Europe's propensity for travel is substantiated by existing literature that underscores the historical and cultural aspects of European travel, as seen in works by Jobs (2009) and Brudett & Duncan (2022). Furthermore, the data from the World Bank in 2022 corroborates Europe's travel culture and Europeans' extraordinary urge to travel. In 2019, Europe accounted for more than half of the world's total international tourist arrivals, a remarkable figure considering it represents only 10 percent of the global population, as indicated by Worldometer (2022). Europe's travel culture prominently shapes Kerala's international tourism landscape and remains a dominant force among other primary source markets. In contrast, North America contributes a relatively smaller portion, with only 10 percent of total tourist departures, despite representing just 5 percent of the world's total population in 2019, as revealed by the same World Bank database (2022).

#### **Prevalence of Culinary Tourism**

Culinary tourism holds significant importance in the realm of tourism, a notion reinforced by Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez-Canzales (2010). They highlight the crucial connection between tourism demand and the length of stay with the satisfaction derived from experiencing local cuisine. In alignment with this perspective, as expressed by 16 stakeholders, foreign tourists exhibit a keen interest in exploring and sampling local foods during their visits (see Table 2). While some individuals make a habit of indulging in local cuisine regularly, the majority of foreign tourists opt to try local dishes on occasion during their travels. This inclination towards experiencing local flavours adds a distinctive and enriching dimension to their overall travel experiences. The United States tourist in Varkala says *"I loved Kerala food. There are so many restaurants here. I eat Indian food all the time"*. According to native shop owner in Varkala, *"there are*

guests who walk to Varkala town and have masala dosa. Beach-side restaurants are expensive here (when compared to town-side restaurants). Mostly they take their own food. They taste Kerala food too, although rare". A Kovalam-based native shop owner states "they include Kerala food in their cuisine as it is less expensive. Our Dosa and Appam are available at less prices". As highlighted by a native shop owner in Fort Kochi, there is a clear preference among both foreigners and North Indians for fish items, particularly seafood, when visiting Fort Kochi. What sets Fort Kochi apart is the unique opportunity for visitors to purchase fresh fish from the local market, including those caught using Chinese fishing nets, and then have it prepared to their liking. This practice is relatively rare in Kerala but adds to the distinctive culinary experience that Fort Kochi offers.

A beach-side restaurateur in Alappuzha corroborates this sentiment, noting that foreign tourists do indeed try Kerala's local food, although not on a daily basis. They particularly appreciate Indian curries, with the Mughal chicken dish being a favourite. This indicates that while foreign tourists may predominantly opt for continental cuisine, they are enthusiastic about exploring local delicacies such as seafood and Dosa. Restaurants situated by the sea in beach destinations often provide continental options, and local dishes tend to be more budget-friendly. Tourists are often excited about the prospect of savouring fresh fish from Kerala's backwaters and the sea, enhancing their overall culinary adventure.

#### **Repeat Visits, Emotional Bond and Reviews**

Visit by the foreign tourists again in Kerala's destinations has been a common pattern (seen Table 2). This was recognised by 17 stakeholders. An Italian tourist (74 year) in Varkala says "I come here every year. I do Ayurvedic treatment every time I come. I visit Varkala cliff every time". There was another foreign tourist, who is aged 77, participated in the interview who has been visiting Varkala beach every year for the past 40 years. Native shop owner in Varkala responds "there are so many tourists who repeat. There are guests who come regularly all the years as they are fond of this place. It may be due to the calmness here (in beach destinations)". Due to the emotional bond they develop with the destination and people in the destination, they want to come over and over again. The category of repeat visits constitutes nearly one-third of the total foreign tourist arrivals in Kerala as per 'Kerala Continuous Tourism Report 2019' (Datamation Consultants Pvt Ltd, 2022).

The identified codes related to repeat visits, emotional bonds, and reviews are intricately connected within the context of Kerala's international tourism. Seventeen stakeholders concur that repeat visitors constitute a significant segment of foreign tourists in Kerala, aligning with Campo-Martinez et al. (2010), who emphasize that a higher level of satisfaction positively influences revisits to a destination. These return visits are often fostered by the emotional bonds

formed between tourists and the destination, leading to the development of trust between tourists and the local service providers and natives.

Furthermore, seven stakeholders note that better reviews and positive word-of-mouth publicity play a pivotal role in encouraging repeat visits. Among these repeat visitors, there are individuals who have been visiting Kerala regularly for many years, indicating a deep-rooted connection to the destination. Reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations serve as clear reflections of the tourists' level of satisfaction with their experiences. The prevalence of repeat visits among foreign tourists across various destinations in Kerala is in line with findings by Moniz (2012), Darnell (2001), and Correia et al. (2015). This underscores the enduring appeal and allure of Kerala as a destination that consistently draws visitors back for more enriching experiences.

#### **Behavioural Problems in the Destinations**

Poor waste management in Kerala's destinations is identified as one of the most dominant negative forces under the category of cultural and psychological factors. Kerala's destinations remain unhygienic and makes the foreign tourists uncomfortable and disgusting according to 18 stakeholders (see Table 2). According to a homestay owner in Alappuzha, "destinations should be kept clean and hygienic to improve tourism. Now it remains unhygienic. Nobody is bothered about it. We cannot blame the government and politicians. Everyone is responsible. Foreign tourists don't like our unhygienic conditions. Our people put waste carelessly. They (foreign tourists) don't do that. This is cultural difference". It implies that unhygienic nature of Kerala's destinations makes foreign tourists uncomfortable. Concerted effort is required to get away from this crisis. In the words of German tourist in Varkala, "what I find, what disturbs me mostly in Varkala, tourism place is so dirty. When I watch three-four days ago, there were many Indians on the beach as groups. Then they dismantle the plastic bags after the use. I watched these people, every party there was a group of five-six-eight people sitting by the sea. Everyone buys the food in the plastic bags and eat it. Afterwards, they just fold down the plastic bags and throw in to the beach". The above responses on poor waste management behaviour in Kerala's top foreign tourist destinations imply that stakeholders including foreign tourists are of same opinion. It significantly emphasizes the importance of effective waste management in Kerala's destinations.

Exactly half of the stakeholders (14) believed that disturbance due to noise and overcrowding in the destinations have been affecting foreign tourists negatively. They also suggested maintaining calm atmosphere in the destinations. Native shop owner in Alappuzha says "they (foreign tourists) like silence. They don't like noisy conditions unlike us". A homestay operator in Fort Kochi describes, "they don't like making noises unlike us. We use to play music

loudly. They use headsets for hearing music, not to make others uncomfortable. They don't like making public announcements on the roads (using microphone) of political parties and various events". According to a restaurateur in Kovalam, "every foreign guest need calm and quite place. That is why all of them prefer properties a little away from the crowded beach area. They want to be free from crowds and nuisance". It is clear from the above responses that foreign tourists feel disturbed by noisy and crowded atmosphere. They just need calm and quite places where they can relax with privacy all day. So, they keep themselves away from main beaches especially in the peak hours according to a restaurateur in Alappuzha beach.

Misbehaviour towards foreign tourists and poor waste management in the state have a detrimental impact on Kerala's international tourism. In terms of the number of responses, inadequate waste management in Kerala's destinations is a widely recognized factor playing a negative role in the region's international tourism. Stakeholders express that poor waste management leaves foreign tourists feeling disgusted and extremely uncomfortable. This sentiment aligns with the findings of Alegre et al. (2011), who discovered a similar result in their study on tourism demand in Spain, emphasizing the significant positive role of hygiene on tourist arrivals. Additionally, waste accumulation tends to grow with the influx of tourists, as noted by Singer et al. (2019). To address this issue, stakeholders stress the need for a concerted and collective effort to properly manage waste.

Noise pollution and overcrowding are further negative factors impacting Kerala's international tourism. According to stakeholders, foreign tourists who visit Kerala's destinations seek tranquillity and privacy and find it challenging to tolerate a noisy atmosphere. While this perspective does not entirely align with the findings of Ay and Gunai (2019), who suggest that some tourists can find relaxation even in high-decibel surroundings, it's noteworthy that foreign tourists are more accepting of noise during special events such as boat races and temple festivals.

Moreover, overseas tourists value their privacy and independence, expressing discomfort with local tourists' staring and unnecessary questions in the destinations, a sentiment shared by seven stakeholders. There have also been reported instances of cheating against foreign guests in the destinations, as confirmed by seven stakeholders, including an elderly lady from Italy, who voiced concerns about the possibility of being cheated. Misbehaviour towards foreign tourists

is another equally pertinent issue affecting Kerala's international tourism, with foreign visitors often feeling uncomfortable and irritated by unwanted attention and inquiries.

#### **Other Cultural and Psychological Factors**

Among the various factors, seven stand out as relatively relevant, garnering between 9 and 11 responses each. Language serves as both an advantage and a barrier, with 11 responses, particularly for tourists from English-speaking countries who find it easier to communicate with natives and shop owners in English. However, it can pose a challenge for non-English-speaking guests. Multilingual travel guides can assist non-English-speaking tour groups. Foreign tourists express excitement about experiencing special events such as temple festivals, the 'Kochi-Muziris Biennale,' and boat races, which occur seasonally. Ten stakeholders specifically mentioned the eagerness of foreign tourists to participate in these events.

Nine stakeholders highlighted that foreign tourists in the state are keen to experience village life and culture, aligning with Fang's (2020) observation that rural tourism can promote economic and social development while benefiting local communities. Another equally relevant theme is "trust building," which naturally develops through regular interactions between foreigners and locals. Once trust is established, foreigners are more likely to accept advice and directions from natives, and they may even provide financial support. Beach-side stays are common among foreign tourists, with nine stakeholders noting its popularity, as it offers comfort for activities like sunbathing. There are numerous beach-side properties available for accommodation, which long-staying guests often prefer. Additionally, seven stakeholders observed that reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations have played a significant role in attracting overseas tourists to the state. Accommodation providers strive to improve guest reviews by enhancing the quality of hospitality.

However, there are ongoing concerns about the potential for tourists to be cheated by unscrupulous individuals. Among other codes related to cultural and psychological factors of Kerala's international tourism detailed in table 2, there are factors with fewer responses, including arrivals for pilgrim tourism, instances of guests' involvement in illegal activities (such as drug trade), perceptions of an unsafe or unfriendly atmosphere, foreign tourists forming marital relationships with locals, and the absence of gender disparity in arrivals, each garnering five or fewer responses.

**Table 2: Organisation of themes on cultural and psychological factors in major foreign tourist destinations in Kerala**

Sl No	Organising themes	Responses	No. of responses (Max:28)
1	Poor waste management	Foreigners are extremely uncomfortable with poor waste management systems in the destinations. They are unhappy with the way in which locals and domestic tourists dispose the wastes.	18
2	Arrivals for leisure	Foreigners arrive mostly for leisure and spend vacation.	18
3	Repeat visits	Most tourists are repeat visitors as they are satisfied and comfortable in the destinations. They are emotionally attached too to the destination, its people and hotel where they stayed in the previous visits.	17
4	Culinary tourism: fresh fish, sea food, local food & globalization of food	Foreigners would like to try local food as part of experiencing destination's culture. They are mostly excited to take fresh backwater fish and seafood. Someone tries other local food items sometimes. There is someone else who regularly take local food in the destination. Their home food is available here too as food is also globalized.	16
5	Disturbed by noise and overcrowding and need calmness	Foreigners are irritated by noise. They choose deserted areas instead of crowded ones in the destinations as they always need calmness and privacy.	14
6	Safe and friendly atmosphere	Destinations are almost free from abuses and assaults on foreign tourists. There could be only a few instances of such misbehaviour just like other locations. Natives are accommodative as well.	14
7	Travel plan and budget of the guests	Everyone has their own travel plan while they arrive. They do only whatever they want to do. Mostly, they have a fixed budget as well across the stay duration.	12
8	Travel mania of Europeans	Europeans normally travel extensively throughout their lifetime. Even at their younger age, they are free to travel irrespective of gender.	11
9	Language: barriers for non-English speaking guests	Although guests from English speaking countries feel comfortable on communication, other guests feel uncomfortable as they are unable to communicate easily in the destinations.	11
10	Special events: festivals, biennale, boat race	Foreigners are excited to experience the events of festivals, biennale, boat race which happens seasonally.	10
11	Effective policing	Police effectively interfere to avoid situations of misbehaviour on foreign tourists.	10
12	Trust building	Trust building is a natural process amid regular and repeated foreigner-local interactions. Once trust building happens, foreigner accepts the advices and directions of the local. They may financially help those locals too.	9
13	Cheating	They don't like to be cheated. They expect they are likely to be cheated unless and until trust building happens.	7
14	Misbehaviour towards foreign tourists: staring and unnecessary questions	Local tourists look staring at foreign tourists due to excitement. Sometimes, they ask unnecessary questions to them too.	7
15	Unnecessary regulations	Strict regulations are imposed on timing of destinations and activities of tourists.	6
16	Emotional bond	They always want to visit the same destination where they visited earlier. They want to stay in the same room where they stayed earlier.	5
17	Overcrowding in some destinations	Due to calmness and easy access to beach, foreigners tend to stay longer in the beach-side accommodation units.	5
18	Pilgrim tourism	Some tourists spend time visiting temples, churches and hermitages.	5
19	A few instances of guests' involvement in illegal activities	Although not normal, some tourists are involved in drug dealings with natives.	4
20	Not safe and friendly atmosphere	Destinations look unsafe as there were a few instances of misbehaviour towards foreign tourists.	3
21	Marital relation	Someone comes into contact with natives and enter into marital relations	3
22	Beach-side restaurants	Availability of beach-side restaurants that serve seafood and continental dishes is a plus	2

Source: Stakeholder interview transcripts

## VI. CONCLUSION

The role of cultural and psychological factors in shaping Kerala's international tourism is undeniably significant, as indicated by the identification of 27 distinct codes, each with varying degrees of influence, ranging from 2 to 18 responses out of a maximum of 28. While the majority of these codes and responses suggest positive contributions to tourist arrivals in the state, the study also sheds light on potential threats to the tourism industry in the 'God's Own Country,'

stemming from a few but serious behavioural problems.

Among the positive cultural and psychological factors, the concept of purposeful arrivals emerges as a crucial category. Stakeholders believe that foreign tourists come to Kerala primarily for holidays, to savour local cuisine, partake in special events such as the 'Kochi-Muziris Biennale', boat races, and temple festivals, and to experience village life. Visiting pilgrim centres, appreciating Kerala's indigenous art forms, and even forming marital relationships with natives are among the other elements associated with

the cultural and psychological fabric of Kerala's international tourism. In addition to purposeful arrivals, the travel culture of Europeans, emotional bonds and reviews, the safety features of destinations, and effective policing serve as positive forces bolstering international tourism.

The prevalence of behavioural problems in Kerala's tourist destinations poses significant barriers to the state's ability to realize its full potential in attracting foreign tourists. Issues such as poor waste management, noise disturbances, overcrowding, cheating, and misbehaviour towards foreign visitors collectively hinder the growth of international tourism. Inadequate waste management not only harms the environment but also detracts from the overall tourist experience. Moreover, excessive noise and overcrowding diminish the tranquillity sought by tourists, while instances of cheating and misbehaviour erode trust and tarnish Kerala's reputation as a welcoming destination. Addressing these challenges is paramount to safeguarding Kerala's appeal to international tourists and unlocking its true tourism potential. Additionally, some issues like unnecessary regulations and the involvement of foreign tourists in

illegal activities were found to be specific to Kovalam. Efforts to tackle these behavioural problems are essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Kerala's tourism industry. Implementing effective waste management initiatives not only preserves the natural beauty of the state but also enhances the overall visitor experience. Similarly, regulating noise levels and managing overcrowding can create a more serene and enjoyable atmosphere for tourists, fostering positive reviews and encouraging repeat visits. By prioritizing the well-being and satisfaction of foreign visitors, Kerala can solidify its position as a premier tourist destination and capitalize on its diverse attractions to attract a broader international audience.

The persistence of these behavioural problems indicates that foreign tourist arrivals in Kerala have not reached their full potential. Nevertheless, the positive growth rate remains intact due to the dominance of positive forces within the realm of cultural and psychological factors, outweighing the impact of behavioural issues. However, it is imperative to address and rectify these behavioural issues to maximize the influx of overseas tourists to Kerala.

## VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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