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Unveiling Tourist Perspectives and Satisfaction in Agritourism: An Empirical Investigation in the 'Palmyra Palm' land of Kerala

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the tourist satisfaction on agritourism in Palakkad based on tourist perspectives. Using a structured questionnaire, the study collected primary data from 465 domestic tourists who visited the study area, through the purposive sampling method. Factor analysis, ANOVA, and multiple regression models were used to assess the relationship between various dimensions and satisfaction, and descriptive statistical techniques were used for examining responses from the Likert scale. Results reveal that eight factors viz., authenticity, educational value, cultural exchange, sustainability, economic contribution, recreational activities, relaxation and wellness, and farm-to-table experience - were used to assess tourist perceptions, and reliability analysis was conducted. By taking into account the multiple regression model, except the 'cultural exchange' dimension, the remaining dimensions are statistically significant with 'educational value' contributing highest in achieving tourists' satisfaction. 'Educational value' often deepens their understanding, encourages a personal development and sense of fulfilment. As most of tourists frequently sought for meaningful experience, and educational opportunities make the tourist destination more impactful and memorable.

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Introduction

Around the world, tourism and travel plays a key role in the development of the socio-economic and cultural context as well as contributing to the creation of jobs.[1] By raising the living standard and boosting nations' economic growth and development, tourism fosters regional convergence and increases domestic demand.[2] Several external and internal factors, including political unrest, the state of the economy, the environment, and other

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considerations, have an impact on the travel and tourism industries.[3] Both developed and developing nations generate revenue by means of tourism.[4] It should be noted that workers engaged in this industry need education and training if they are interested in providing tourists with a professional level of service.[5]

Agritourism is frequently considered as, a combination of agricultural products, activities, and customs with entertaining and educational goals, that serves as an attraction for tourists and, in the end, increases farmers' income.[6] Agritourism has been increasingly recognised as a unique type of recreational and educational endeavour in the range of affordable alternatives for tourists' when deciding travel spots.[7-9] especially after the integration of the global market for agriculture.[10] It has been noted that while basic efforts in the area of agritourism began in Western nations in the 1980s, this have not received much attention in South Asian nations that are characterised predominantly by farming activities.[11-13]

The Indian economy depends primarily on agriculture. Approximately more than 65% of the population is reliant on agriculture. About 13% of the overall GDP is generated by the agricultural industry. The impact of agriculture on the national GDP would expand if there were more income-generating sectors available to supplement the current agricultural industry. It can be accomplished through agritourism.[14] Hence, India is a vital market for agritourism. India's tourism and hospitality industries are projected to generate US$50.9 billion by 2028.[15] Hence, the long-term effects of agritourism on the local well-being and the natural environment are intrinsically connected to the community's financial, social, and cultural factors and have a multiplier impact on all areas in which it engages.[16] Some are of the opinion that agritourism lessens the adverse impacts of tourism and serves the twin purposes of improving the welfare of the rural community, which is facing difficulties, and promoting the growth of a sustainable tourism industry.[17] Economies heavily rely on the tourist and leisure sectors, and consumer satisfaction has a significant impact on these sectors.[5] In the context of Kerala, which is also referred to as "God's Own Country," is one of Asia's most popular travel destinations. Kerala, a state designated for agriculture, has enormous potential to significantly expand farm tourism with no more funding. In Kerala, farm tourism is emerging as a relatively new kind of travel. Kerala is a state where farming and agricultural pursuits are the main industry. Kerala is well-known for its ecotourism activities in particular. Kerala is one of the most visited places in the world because of its distinct customs and culture as well as its diverse population. The government of Kerala has implemented a number of measures for promoting agri-tourism. As a division of the Responsible Tourism Mission, Kerala's Tourism Minister, Sri. Muhammad Riyaz, launched the Kerala Agri-Tourism Network initiative in September 2021 with the goal of fusing tourism with agriculture. In partnership with the Local Government Department, this project seeks to discover and create 500 new tourism centres in rural regions over the course of the following five years. The tourism department started the "Kerala Agri-Tourism Network" website as part of this attempt to advertise Kerala's agritourism destinations. In order to get the positive outcomes of all this initiative, it is important to know the attitude of tourists.

Hence, it is crucial to determine how individuals perceive the social and natural environment of a destination since carrying this out will advance the travel and tourism sectors.[18] In addition to understanding local attitudes, understanding tourist perceptions is crucial for developing effective tourism plans and policies, if tourists are dealt with disrespect or with indifference, a destination may eventually lose its appeal.[19] A structured questionnaire was employed by many researchers to evaluate tourist perceptions. Most of the study utilised a Likert scale with a scale of 5, 7 with the greatest number representing agreement or satisfaction and the least number representing disagreement or discontent.[19,20-24] In addition, multivariate regression analysis and exploratory factor analysis were applied to minimise the total number of relevant elements.[19] The PLS-SEM approach was employed to justify the small number of participants and tourists' views on destination travel qualities that are quantified by formative constructs.[21,24] ANOVA techniques were employed to determine the change in attitude of tourists.[19,22]

The current research area, Palakkad known as the 'palmyra palm' has seen a sharp increase in the number of tourists since 2009, except for the year 2020 due to the outbreak of global coronavirus.[25] The government authorities and state tourism department are preparing to launch a number of

programmes to promote household farming and agritourism in Kerala. It was planned that within 2 years, 5000 homestead farms and up to 500 farm tourism units would be formed under Responsible Tourism objectives. The Subhiksha Keralam initiatives for promoting food security will be connected to agritourism.[26] Despite this importance, there are only a few studies that have investigated about the tourist destinations at Palakkad, mainly focusing on sustainable tourism,[27,28] despite the fact that the district has a rural economy and is blessed with various tourist attractions such as unique palmyra palms, peaceful lakes, and forests that are interwoven with the beauty of nature.[28] which can be directed towards agritourism.

The goal of the current investigation is to contribute to the existing knowledge on tourism by determining the level of satisfaction with agritourism in the Palakkad district based on a few dimensions. It proposes a methodological framework to examine the role of agritourism and its features in attracting tourists, thereby contributing to the economic development of destinations. Since there is a lack of research on tourist perceptions of agritourism and how that perspective affects a particular destination, this study will contribute to bridging the knowledge gap in this field and provide information to stakeholders and policymakers who are involved in improving the region's tourism to draw more tourists. The next section of the paper covers the theoretical framework and a brief analysis of the existing literature. The methodology section included a brief description of the area of investigation, sampling procedure, and research tools employed for the analysis. The outcomes of the data analysis are presented in the section on results and discussion, together with adequate reasoning, an estimated explanation as to why they occurred, and, when applicable, a comparison to previous research. The conclusion part includes some application of the research, study recommendations, limitations, and potential areas for future investigations.

Materials and Method

Theoretical Framework

In developing nations, the tourism sector is often regarded as an integral component of the economy and contributes significantly to its economic growth.[23] It is essential for tourism marketing to have an awareness of tourist preferences and their travel-related behaviours in order to segment the market and devise efficient promotional strategies. It is essential to enhance the infrastructure, goods, and services to meet the needs of tourists.[29,30] emphasise the need to encourage local populations' participation in decision-making processes related to tourism and ensure benefits are distributed fairly. Agritourism is gradually becoming recognised as a unique type of leisure activity due to the range of alternative tourist locations.[7] Agritourism has the potential to bring about a mutually beneficial relationship for both tourists and farmers. Farmers gain from an extra source of revenue, and tourists are satisfied with the beauty of the environment.[30]

Prominent tourist attractions are perceived as being more authentic when they are located in areas with significant heritage experiences, a value that is balanced by iconicity. And this authenticity creates an emotional connection between the tourist and destination by creating a feeling of trust and comfort.[31] Agritourism is considered a sustainable way to grow rural communities where tourism and agriculture coexist. It promotes the local environment, cultural heritage, customs, arts, and crafts. The agritourism site teaches the tourists through hands-on activities that will enable them to learn new knowledge. With this new information, tourists were able to modify their purchasing habits, feel more secure about the food they were purchasing, and also increase their willingness to pay for farm products.[32,33] At the same time, the attitude of the community is important for effective and sustainable tourism development. Hence, the community plays a crucial role, as they will have an impact on tourism planning and advancement, either favourably or unfavourably. Favourably, interaction between locals and tourists may lead to the creation of opportunities, the promotion of societal harmony, and the blending of various cultures.[34-36] the development of tourism products, including spas, fitness courses, body treatments, and traditional foods, attracts tourists. Table 1 displays the main dimension of tourist perception and associated characteristics that have been studied by researchers in several publications. According to studies, five factors—namely, authenticity, educational value, cultural exchange, health and well-being, sustainability, and economic growth—can be applied to portray tourist perceptions about agritourism and demonstrate how much they are satisfied.

Table 1: Dimensions and their related characteristics

Dimensions	Attributes	References
Authenticity	Enhances the understanding of agricultural heritage and its preservation (A1) Offers an authentic and genuine agricultural experience (A2) Raises awareness about the need for environmentally friendly farming methods (A3) Allows tourists to connect with the rural and agricultural way of life (A4) It immerses tourists in the authentic agricultural environment (A5) Enhances the understanding of agricultural heritage and its preservation (A6) Provides an opportunity to witness traditional farming practices first-hand (A7) Supports the growth of local businesses, such as farm markets and agri-based products (A8)	24, 31, 37, 38
Educational Value	Agri-tourism activities contribute to the educational experience of tourists (E1) Educates tourists about the importance of food production and its impact on the environment (E2) Enhances visitors' knowledge of the agricultural industry (E3) Raises awareness about the need for conservation and sustainable land use (E4) Demonstrates the role of agriculture in achieving long-term enviro-nmental sustainability (E5) Generates additional income for local farmers and rural communities (E6)	39, 40, 33
Cultural Exchange	Facilitates cultural exchange between tourists and local communities (C1) Encourages interactions with farmers and agricultural workers, fostering cross-cultural understanding (C2) Emphasizes the importance of responsible tourism and its role in supporting sustainable rural development (C3) Provides an opportunity to witness traditional farming practices first-hand (C4)	34, 35, 41
Health and Well-being	Offers recreational activities such as farm tours, nature walks, and farm animal interactions (H1) Provides opportunities for outdoor adventures in a rural setting (H2) Agri-tourism includes activities like fruit picking, vegetable harvesting, or wine tasting (H3) Offers recreational options that cater to different interests and age groups (H4) Promotes relaxation and stress relief in a natural and peaceful setting (H5) Provides wellness activities like yoga, meditation, or spa treatments (H6) Allows tourists to rejuvenate and recharge amidst the beauty of agricultural landscapes and generate income for local farmers (H7) Offers opportunities to taste fresh, locally grown produce (H8)	36, 42-47

	Agri-tourism introduces visitors to local food traditions and culinary delights (H9)	
	Emphasizes the connection between agriculture and the food on our plates (H10)	
Sustainability and Economic Growth	Exposes tourists to traditional customs and rituals associated with agriculture (S1)	32, 48-50
	Promotes the appreciation of cultural diversity through shared agricultural experiences (S2)	
	Agri-tourism showcases sustainable agricultural practices and their positive impact on the environment (S3)	
	Promotes learning about farming techniques and sustainable agricultural practices (S4)	
	Provides insights into the lifecycle of crops and livestock (S5)	
	Encourages tourists to support local agricultural communities for long-term sustainability (S6)	
	Creates employment opportunities in the agricultural sector (S7)	
	Offers a serene and tranquil environment, providing a break from urban life (S8)	

Authenticity

Tourist perceptions of authenticity are greatly influenced by natural landscapes, human characteristics, and preferred policies.[38] At the same time, tourists consider the perception of attraction in regards to authenticity factors as a function of its location or the significance of cultural experience at that place.[31]

Educational Value

A method of using farms to attract tourists and students for educational objectives, such as recreation or active participation in farm tasks or nature-related work, can be regarded as educational agritourism.[39] Even the tourists from rural areas expressed their view that, despite the fact that visiting farms may be interesting, such a visit would teach them something about agriculture.[33]

Cultural Exchange

Understanding social images as well as the various ways to interact with cultural diversity and participate in tourist activities may be facilitated by cultural sensitivity. This can not only increase trade and profit but also recognise diversity as an important aspect of history and culture.[51] On the other hand, the influence of tourism has a significant impact on both the local resident's satisfaction and discomfort. There is a strong correlation between the quality of life of locals and their support for tourism development, which will have a social, cultural, ecological, and economic impact.[52]

Health and well-Being

Tourists are increasingly opting for health or wellness tourism as a means of enhancing their health.[44] Tourists may encounter new experiences by going on vacation and escaping their daily routines. Participation in leisure activities raises one's subjective well-being.[45] In communities without many other tourist attractions or natural surroundings, food and drink may be a means to draw tourists and create a sense of identity.[42] Preference for a particular food is often influences the choice of destination by the tourist.[47]

Sustainability and Economic Growth

Agritourism may provide the farmers with opportunities for diversification to increase their income and enhance the sustainability of their business. It is a way to educate the people about the values of agriculture and how they affect the nation's economy and quality of life. It also aids in the preservation of agricultural land.[48]

Based on the literature review, figure 1 provides an illustration of the theoretical framework of the current investigation.

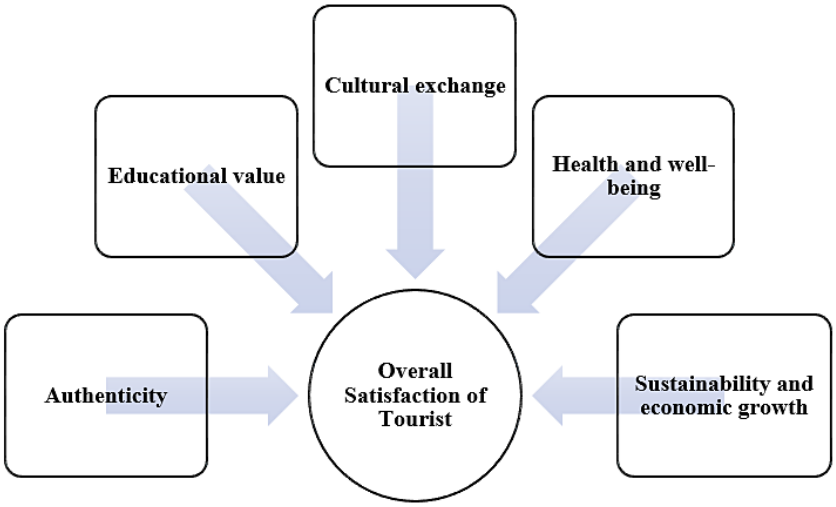

Fig.1: Satisfaction of tourists' and five major factors

Data

The study was undertaken in Palakkad. Referred to as the 'Gateway of Kerala' owing to the presence of Palakkad Gap, it is the largest district among the 14 districts of Kerala. Set up on January 1st, 1957, the district is primarily rural and is situated in the centre of Kerala. Known as 'Palakkattuchery' in ancient times, the district name originates from the term 'Palanilam', implying 'dry lands', according to etymologists. It is considered as the land of palm trees and paddy fields.[53] Palakkad Fort, Silent Valley National Park, Nelliyampathy, Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary, Meenvallam, and Malampuzha Dam Garden are a few of the tourist spots in the district. According to Tourism Statistics, 41 foreign tourists and 200801 domestic tourists arrived in Palakkad during 2021, despite the global outbreak of COVID-19.[25] In order to gather information about the perceptions of tourists about agritourism, a survey-based evaluation has been applied. Data regarding tourist perceptions was gathered from April to June 2024 using a structured questionnaire. Precautions were taken to prevent repetition, so tourists interviewed at one location were not interviewed at another location. The decision was taken to concentrate on tourists who visit the area of investigation in groups or as individuals after careful evaluation of the accuracy and breadth of the data. Interviews were mainly carried out while tourists were relaxing in the surroundings of the tourist destinations. The interview ranged from 20 to 45 minutes in duration, with 25 minutes being the average.

Sampling Procedure and Research Tool

The population for this research is comprised of tourists who visited Palakkad district. 500 domestic tourists were targeted as a sample. According to Cattell,[54] the ideal sample size for statistical analysis is at least 250 respondents. A purposive sampling technique was employed. A questionnaire was developed and used to collect the data from tourists, which included questions on demographic factors as well as their perception of agritourism. The first part of the questionnaire concentrated on individual characteristics of tourists such as gender, age, level of education, household income, place of residence, and purpose of visit. In the second part, which mainly includes a number of statements for determining how tourists perceive agritourism in the study area, The respondents were provided with an opportunity to respond to each of the given statements or attributes using a five-point Likert scale, with options such as strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Prior to the final survey, the questionnaire was validated by undertaking a pilot study with 20 respondents. The questionnaire used in the agritourism research was revised for improved clarity and focus after a pilot study revealed problems including confusing language or unclear questions. Major changes occured regarding the statement which has been initially included under the factor 'authenticity'. 35 questionnaires were eliminated from the survey in order to prevent misleading statistical results, which led to a response rate of 93%. The requirement for a

representative and statistically significant sample of visitors and stakeholders in Palakkad District led to the selection of 465 respondents. While taking into consideration demographic variety, such as different age groups, income levels, and hobbies, this sample size guaranteed the accuracy of the findings.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative information was gathered in Microsoft Excel, and SPSS was used for analysis. A descriptive analysis was performed to create a socio-demographic profile of the respondents (such as gender, age, educational level, household level income, and area of residence) as well as to identify the purpose of the visit. To compute the tourist perception of agritourism, the research employed 35 sets of items. When using the five-point Likert scale to measure each statement, an average score below 3.05 can be regarded as a cut point to indicate disagreement. Using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation, the 35 items and variables are grouped into a few dimensions. Exploratory factor analysis was also employed. Additionally, the Barlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures are computed to determine whether the sample is adequate. The sampling is appropriate or sufficient if the KMO value is greater than 0.5,[55] whereas Pallant (2020) suggests that the minimum value of KMO should be greater than 0.6. At the same time, Kaiser[56] suggests a minimum requirement of 0.5. To determine the consistency of the items in a group, reliability analysis has been undertaken. The extent to which a measurement process yields consistent results when it is repeated under similar circumstances is known as reliability.[20] In 1951, Cronbach created the alpha statistic as a measure of the internal reliability of a test or scale, which is a value between 0 and 1. Alpha scores between 0.7 and 0.8 are considered appropriate for group comparisons.

Multiple Linear Regression Model

A multiple linear regression model was proposed to determine the influence of various factors on the overall satisfaction of tourists with agritourism in the study area. A generalisation of simple linear regression when there is more than one predictor variable is known as multiple linear regression.[57] The relation between regressand and regressor factors is expressed by the following equation in a multiple linear regression model where there are explanatory variables.[58]

$$Yi = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1_i} + \beta_2 x_{2_i} + \beta_3 x_{3_i} + \ldots + \beta_p x_{pi} + e_i \quad \ldots(1)$$

Where;
β_0 = Constant term
e_i = error term

β_1 to β_p are the partial regression or partial slope coefficients associated with p independent variables to the relevant variable. The partial regression coefficient has the following definitions: for instance, β_1 represent or measures the change in the mean value of Y_i (dependent variable) per unit change in x1 (independent variable).[59]

In the current study, the multiple model regression includes the following equation.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta x \quad \ldots(2)$$

Where Y (dependent variable) is the observed level of satisfaction among tourist x, β_0 is the constant, x is the set of dimensions/ perception factors/ independent variable and β= set of estimated regression coefficients.

The multiple coefficients of R^2 are employed to measure the percentage of the total variance that the regression model is able to take into account. In order to validate the fitted regression model, an ANOVA with significant f-statistic is used. The F-test is often performed for determining whether the computed regression coefficient is statistically significant.[20]

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

According to the descriptive evaluation of the data shown in table 2, the sample used for the study is comprised of domestic tourists, and respondents to the survey were most likely to be male (62.15%). The majority of the respondents (41.72%) fall into the age category below 28, as they are active, vibrant, and enjoy travelling.[20] Most of the respondents (36.13%) have completed graduation. 40.65% of the respondents have a monthly income of Rs.25,000– Rs.75,000. 59.78% of those who responded were from rural areas, while 40.22% were from urban areas. The area under investigation

is visited by respondents for a variety of reasons, including recreational pursuits (19.78%), study trips (32.90%), picnics (17.85%), sight-seeing (17.42%), and business (12.04%). 51.18% of participants are unmarried, and 48.82% are married.

Table 2: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics		N	Percent
Gender (n=465)	Male	289	62.15
	Female	176	37.85
Age (n=465)	Below 18	65	13.98
	19-28	129	27.74
	29-38	97	20.86
	39-48	82	17.63
	48 and above	92	19.78
Educational Status (n=465)	High school	87	18.71
	Higher Secondary	78	16.77
	Graduate	168	36.13
	Post Graduate	94	20.22
	PhD	7	1.51
	Other	31	6.67
Household income (per month) (n=465)	Less than 25,000	107	23.01
	25,001- 75,000	189	40.65
	75,001-1,25,000	91	19.57
	Above 1,25,000	78	16.77
Area (n=465)	Rural	278	59.78
	Urban	137	40.22
Purpose of visit (n=465)	Recreational pursuits	92	19.78
	Study trip	153	32.90
	Picnics	83	17.85
	Sight-seeing	81	17.42
	Business	56	12.04
Marital Status (n=465)	Single	238	51.18
	Married	227	48.82

Agritourism- Determining the Major Dimensions

In order to determine the underlying construct of a given dataset according to the relationship among the components, the 35 items for agritourism were subjected to exploratory factor analysis.[60] All the factors that have an eigen value larger than 1.0 are retained under the eigen value greater than 1.0 rule, commonly referred to as the K1 rule (Kaiser rule). According to the rationale, factors that are worth maintaining should at the very least have greater variation than any of the original evaluation variables that constitute the factors.[61] And a cut-off factor loading of 0.5 was chosen. In order to determine the factorability of the data set, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy as well as Bartlett's test of sphericity were applied.[62] The equation used for the KMO measure of sampling adequacy is as follows.

$$KMOj=\frac{\sum_{i\neq j} R_{ij}^2}{\sum_{i\neq j} R_{ij}^2+\sum_{i\neq j} U_{ij}^2} \quad ...(3)$$

KMO values ranges from 0 to 1. The sample is sufficient if the KMO value range from 0.8 to 1.0.If the value is between 0.7 and 0.79, then it is substandard, whereas it is average, if the values are between 0.6 and 0.69. When the KMO value is less than 0.6, it means the samples are insufficient and corrective action has to be undertaken.[55,60,62] For the current study, the KMO value is 0.87. Bartletts' test of sphericity is used "to test the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix".[63]

The Bartletts' test of sphericity was significant (χ^2 = 2586.239, p< 0.000) with 79.48% of total variance extracted. The construct was found suitable for factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis is undertaken to "determine fundamental conceptual aspects that may be investigated in the future study". EFA was initially conducted using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation with the Kaiser normalisation.[63,64]

Table 3: Major dimension and their items based on factor analysis with Mean and S.D

Factor	Items of the Questionnaire (Variables Observed)	Loading	% of variance	Cronbach's alpha	Eigen value	Mean	S.D
Authenticity	A2	0.75	21.16	0.87	7.5	3.32	0.962
	A4	0.72				3.85	0.854
	C4	0.86				3.47	0.947
	A5	0.67				3.12	1.24
	A6	0.69				2.98	0.981
Educational value	E1	0.74	15.39	0.74	6.12	3.56	1.512
	S4	0.71				2.99	0.869
	S5	0.69				3.68	0.964
	E2	0.66				2.47	0.974
	E3	0.78				3.21	1.005
Cultural Exchange	C1	0.89	11.48	0.84	5.47	3.55	1.241
	C2	0.81				3.6	1.114
	S1	0.84				2.88	0.968
	S2	0.82				3.02	0.854
Sustainability	S3	0.72	9.86	0.69	5.12	3.69	0.759
	C3	0.78				3.22	0.896
	A3	0.63				3.39	0.953
	S6	0.81				3.69	1.274
	E4	0.74				3.87	0.841
	E5	0.65				2.93	0.798
Economic Contribution	E6	0.68	7.65	0.71	3.26	3.41	1.15
	S7	0.78				3.63	0.953
	A7	0.84				3.44	0.941
	H7	0.76				3.81	1.21
Recreational Activities	H4	0.78	6.32	0.66	2.12	3.17	0.974
	H2	0.85				2.94	0.846
	H3	0.89				3.05	0.754
	H1.	0.63				3.05	0.798
Relaxation and Wellness	S8	0.75	4.21	0.91	1.56	3.19	0.842
	H5	0.79				3.57	1.27
	H6	0.85				3.85	1.18
	A1	0.68				3.16	0.966
Farm-to-Table Experience	H8	0.83	3.41	0.73	1.14	3.35	0.812
	H9	0.71				3.41	0.798
	H10	0.8				2.93	0.863

Note: p < 0.000; KMO-MSA= 0.87; *Bartlett's test of sphericity*= 2586.239)
Note: *Five-point Likert scale were employed*

According to the findings of the factor analysis (Table 3), the initial five components are not supported. When the loadings were carefully examined, it became clear that a few items under the initial five components needed to be dropped since they did not load strongly under the given dimensions, and the same items needed to be added under a new dimension. Therefore, the existing factors were renamed and new factors were added to more accurately reflect the findings of the factor analysis. Finally, eight factors were formed from the factor analysis such as authenticity, educational value, cultural exchange, sustainability, economic contribution, recreational activities, relaxation and wellness and farm-to-table experience.

Overall Perception and Satisfaction Level of Tourists

Table 4 displays the aggregated mean score, standard deviation, Cronbach alpha, and level of agreement by tourists among the eight dimensions. The cultural exchange dimension, which has the lowest aggregated mean score (2.61) and economic contribution has the highest mean score. The other factors exhibit an appropriate degree of satisfaction among the tourists, with an average mean score more than 3.05. A Cronbach's alpha score of 0.6 or higher indicates that the question set provides accurate information on how tourists perceive the eight dimensions that are being taken into consideration.

Table 4: Mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha for eight dimensions

Factor	Aggregated Mean	S.D	Cronbach's alpha	Agreement level
Authenticity	3.35	0.85	0.87	Satisfied
Educational value	3.18	0.72	0.74	Satisfied
Cultural Exchange	2.61	0.77	0.84	Dissatisfied
Sustainability	3.47	0.69	0.67	Satisfied
Economic Contribution	3.57	0.72	0.71	Satisfied
Recreational Activities	3.05	0.82	0.66	Satisfied
Relaxation and Wellness	3.44	0.78	0.91	Satisfied
Farm-to-Table Experience	3.23	0.67	0.73	Satisfied

Multiple Regression Analysis

The association or interrelationship among the predicted and more than two predictor variables is examined using multiple regression analysis.[59] As given in equation (2), the current research proposes a multiple regression model with eight independent variables such as perception of authenticity, perception of educational value, perception of cultural exchange, perception of sustainability, perception of economic contribution, perception of recreational activities, perception of relaxation and wellness, and perception of farm-to-table experience in order to analyse the major factors contributing to the tourists' satisfaction level towards agritourism. The least squares method was used to estimate the model parameters.[65] For considering the goodness of fit of the fitted regression model, multiple correlation coefficients (R), coefficients of determination (R^2) as well as F-statistic in the ANOVA table are evaluated.

Table 5 presents the findings of regression analysis. The multiple correlation coefficient R, is 0.647 indicating that perception of tourists has a positive association with the 8 independent factors. With R^2 = 0.425, suggests that around 42.5% of the variation in the overall perception of tourists can be explained with these 8 factors.

Table 5: Summary of the Model

R	R^2	S.E of the estimate
0.647	0.419	0.576

The observed F-value given in table 6 indicates that the outcomes of the estimated regression model may have occurred by chance, with a value of 41.738. The estimated regression model has an adequate level of goodness of fit, especially in forecasting the

variance in tourists' satisfaction with agritourism. Based on the data (table 5), the ANOVA results show that the fitted regression model is the one that accurately explains the relation between satisfaction of tourists' and related independent perception components. As a result, a few dimensions in the estimated regression model play a significant role in determining how satisfied tourists are with agritourism in Palakkad.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	f	Sig. level
Regression	25.762	8	5.627	41.738	0.000
Residual	46.395	457	0.217		
Total	72.157	465			

Table 7 shows the results of the regression analysis. The relative significance of various factors (independent variables) in influencing the variance in overall tourist satisfaction towards agritourism (dependent variables) may be deduced from the beta coefficients of regression analysis. The factor Educational Value, with a beta $\beta = 0.26$ ($p < 0.001$), had the highest weight for tourist satisfaction towards agritourism. The findings indicated that an increase of a unit in perception with regard to Educational Value leads to a 0.26 unit rise in overall tourist satisfaction.

Table 7. Results of Regression Analysis

			95% C.I.			
Variable/Dimension	**β**	**SE (β)**	**Lower bound**	**Upper bound**	**t-value**	**Sig. level**
Constant	1.56	0.26	-	-	-	-
Authenticity	0.12	0.05	0.02	0.23	2.24	0.046**
Educational value	0.26	0.07	0.12	0.4	3.96	0.000***
Cultural Exchange	0.08	0.06	0.03	0.31	1.64	0.116
Sustainability	0.16	0.07	0.03	0.27	2.18	0.023**
Economic Contribution	0.21	0.06	0.1	0.36	2.74	0.053*
Recreational Activities	0.18	0.06	0.06	0.29	2.31	0.000***
Relaxation and Wellness	0.14	0.07		0.24	1.98	0.042**
Farm-to-Table Experience	0.15	0.08	0.05	0.25	2.09	0.000***

Dependent: Tourist perception
***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.10

Based on the current research, the multiple regression model for tourist satisfaction is given below.

Overall satisfaction, Y = 1.56 + 0.12** x (perception on authenticity) + 0.26*** x (perception on educational value) + 0.08 x (perception on cultural exchange) + 0.16** x (perception on sustainability) + 0.21* x (perception on economic contribution) + 0.18*** x (perception on recreational activities) + 0.14** x (perception on relaxation and well-being) + 0.15*** x (perception on farm-to-table experience)

Discussion

Regarding the socio-economic characteristics, the study found that around 50 percentage of respondents belong to the age group 19-38. Due to the adventure and general understanding of agriculture, young people are more inclined towards tourism than older tourists, according to the demographic statistics of the respondents. Findings were in line with earlier research,[66,67] which indicates that there is a strong link between tourist satisfaction or behavioural intentions as well as perception of the destination, which is greatly influenced by the visitor's characteristics.

In order to find out the major factor related to agritourism effecting the perception of the tourist, the study have undertaken the exploratory factor analysis. Accordingly, eight factors have been identified. The first factor named 'authenticity' comprises five items, accounting for 21.16% of variance. Labelled as educational value, the second factor constituting six items explained 15.39% of the variance. Cultural exchange, the third factor, included four items with 11.48% of the variance explained. Factor 4 was named sustainability, having six items associated with the significance of agritourism and environmental sustainability, explaining 9.86% of variance. Four items constituted the fifth factor, economic contribution, and accounted for 7.65% of the variability. The recreational activities, which included 4 items and 6.32% of the variation explained, is the sixth factor. Factor 7 indicated relaxation and wellness, which accounted for 4.21% of variability and was supported by four items. Factor 8 is labelled farm-to-table experience, having three items and explaining 3.41% of variance explained. Cronbach's alpha is commonly employed as a measure of tool or scale reliability or internal consistency. If the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.7 or greater, then there is acceptable internal consistency.[67,68] Additionally, an alpha value of 0.60 denotes a satisfactory level of internal consistency, as stated by Hair.[69] In order to verify the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's coefficients were computed for each of the eight dimensions. The overall scale's Cronbach's alpha value was 0.69, while the coefficients for the eight factors varied from 0.66 to 0.91, suggesting that the factor's internal consistency was moderate to strong.

Table 3 also demonstrates how visitors perceive the eight dimensions that were taken into consideration about agritourism in the study region. Five statements were employed in estimating the perception level of authenticity. The greatest mean score (3.85) has been attained by the statement "Allows tourists to connect with rural and agricultural ways of life". This suggests that tourists are more interested in learning as well as adapting to a rural way of life. The statement "Enhances the understanding of agricultural heritage and its preservation" has scored the lowest mean rating (2.98). It indicates that tourists may have the attitude that meaningful knowledge of agricultural heritage cannot be achieved by participating in agritourism activities, which may offer a market version of it.

Similarly, five statements were employed for assessing how tourists perceived the educational value of agritourism. The statement "Provide understandings into the lifecycle of crops and livestock" had the highest mean score (3.68). One of the most possible reasons is that the tourist was often encouraged to take part in activities including cultivating, harvesting, or even tending to livestock on the farm. Knowledge about different stages of growth in crops and the care necessary for livestock. Respondents responded unfavourably to the statement "Educates tourists about the importance of food production and its impact on the environment," with a mean score of 2.47. Even though tourists may learn about farming techniques and observe farming operations, the institutional method could not effectively address wider environmental effects such as water use, pesticide use, or soil deterioration. Without accurate information, tourists could not completely understand the complicated issues associated with food production, such as the significance of sustainable farming procedures, conserving biodiversity, or the emission of GHGs as an outcome of various cultivation patterns.

Four statements were used to assess the perception of tourists towards the dimension of cultural exchange in agritourism. By securing the highest mean score (3.55), tourists have a positive attitude towards the statement "Facilitates cultural exchange between tourists and local communities". This suggests that agritourism has the important

characteristic of allowing interaction with local farmers and communities. Through this direct contact, tourists have the opportunity to learn about their traditions, rituals, and way of life. This may lead to a greater understanding of the local lifestyle while also encouraging respect, admiration, and information sharing about rural living. The lowest mean score of 2.88 for the statement "Promotes the appreciation of cultural diversity through shared experiences" reflects some of the ways agritourism activities could intentionally encourage cultural appreciation by modifying and even commercialising cultural practises without due respect or knowledge. It can be detrimental to the awareness of cultural variety and result in a limited understanding of the cultural relevance of agricultural practises.

Table 3 also highlights tourists' perception of *sustainability.* It is composed of six statements. The statement "Raises awareness about the need for conservation and sustainable land use" had the highest mean score of 3.87, indicating that the activities related to agritourism frequently incorporate educational elements that emphasise the value of protection and sustainable usage of land. And tourists get a chance to experience various environments, such as wetlands and pasturelands, and develop a greater understanding of the significance of protecting such regions. The lowest mean score (3.22) reflects that agritourism does not always provide an equitable contribution to sustainable rural growth. Tourists might participate in activities without fully comprehending the effects of their actions on the environment or the local population. The ability of tourists to actively promote sustainable agricultural growth through responsible tourism practises is constrained by the absence of comprehensive data and awareness-building programmes. Tourist perceptions towards the economic contribution from agritourism in the study area have been examined using four statements. The statement "Allows tourists to rejuvenate and recharge amidst the beauty of agricultural landscapes and generate income for local farmers" has achieved the highest mean score (3.81), which is indicative that agritourism activities attract tourists who spend money on local goods and services, lodging, food, and transportation. The region experiences a large economic impact as a result of the increase in tourist spending, which benefits local businesses, farmers, and service providers. The local economy is stimulated by increased economic activity, which fosters the expansion of businesses and the generation of employment opportunities. The statement with the lowest mean score (3.41) reflects the fact that although agritourism has the potential to ultimately result in generating income for farmers in rural areas, the benefit may not be as significant as it appears. In some instances, the revenue earned from agritourism may not make a major difference to farmers' total income. This may be due to a number of factors, including ineffective marketing tactics and high operating expenses. Tourists' may contend that the revenue generated as a result is insufficient to have a significant effect on the financial stability of nearby farms and communities.

Table 3 further illustrates how to consider agritourism activities as an opportunity for recreation. It is computed using four statements. The statement "Offers recreational activities such as farm tours, nature walks, and farm-animal interactions" had the highest mean score (3.17), in contrast to the statement "Provide opportunities for outdoor adventures in a rural setting" which had the least mean score (2.94). The perception of tourists on the dimension relaxation and wellness' is computed using four statements. The statement "Provides wellness activities such as yoga, meditation, or spa treatment" achieved the highest mean score (3.85). Tourists can benefit by incorporating such activities, as they will take into consideration their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These wellness practises improve consciousness, reduce stress, and promote general self-care. The lowest mean score (3.16) for the statement "Allows tourists to rejuvenate and recharge amidst the beauty of agricultural landscapes" suggests that tourists have different preferences for rejuvenation and recharge. While some tourists could find peace and refreshment in rural settings, others would prefer alternative settings, including the mountains and urban retreats. Therefore, not all visitors may find that the agricultural landscapes provide them with the desired environment for their intended sense of renewal. 'Farm-to-table experience, which highlights the importance of the relationship between agricultural production and dining satisfaction, is comprised of three statements. With a mean score of 3.41, the statement "Agritourism introduces visitors to local food traditions and culinary delights" has

the highest mean score, whereas the statement "Emphasises the connection between agriculture and the food on our plates" has the lowest mean score (2.93).

While analysing the overall satisfaction of the tourist, the cultural exchange dimension, which has the lowest aggregated mean score (2.61), demonstrates that tourists were dissatisfied with the opinion that agritourism contributes to cross-cultural exchange. This also suggests that tourists have a poor opinion that agritourism leads to an understanding of cultural diversity via interpersonal interaction with farmers and exposes tourists to habits and rituals related to agriculture in indigenous cultures. The aggregate mean score (3.35) of 'Authenticity' indicates that the perception of tourists towards this component is satisfactory. The tourists believe that agritourism often provides them with an authentic farming experience and connects them to the agrarian way of life. The distinctive blend of geographical features, including landscape, regional culture, heritage, and traditional farming practises, has an impact on the authenticity of an agritourism destination. With an interaction between tourists, the local environment, and people, the authenticity of the destination may be improved.[70] The dimension 'Educational Value' has an aggregated mean score of 3.18, which indicates the tourists have a favourable opinion that activities related to agritourism help to increase their understanding of farming. As tourism is considered a novel activity for agriculturalists, it leads to the development of farmers skills too.[40]

The overall score (3.47) for the 'Sustainability' dimension denotes a positive attitude and implies that agritourism exemplifies the contribution of agriculture towards achieving sustainable development and emphasises the value of environmentally responsible tourism. According to the average mean score of 'Economic Contribution' (3.57), tourist perception towards this dimension is positive. This implies that agritourism encourages the expansion of local businesses that produce products from agriculture as well as provides job prospects in agriculture. Agritourism can be used as an alternative to boost revenue and has the potential to contribute to the economic sustainability of small farmers and rural communities.[39] Though tourism leads to creating employment opportunities[71] and improving infrastructure, there is a concern from the local community that tourism may lead to sociocultural issues such as gambling, increasing alcohol consumption, and the disposal of waste that is both solid and liquid in the environment.[35]

The dimension 'Recreational Activities' has an average mean score of 3.05, suggesting that tourists have a favourable opinion that agritourism provides them with leisure alternatives for people of all ages and interests. Traditionally, tourism has placed a strong emphasis on leisure, enjoyment, and the natural world. However, recently, tourism has evolved to offer more engaging and genuine experiences that are centred on tourists' personal development.[46] The dimension 'Relaxation and Wellness', with an aggregate mean score of 3.44, demonstrates that tourists have a far more positive perception, and they believe that this dimension of agritourism in the research area offers health-promoting activities including yoga and meditation, thereby leading to stress relief. According to the aggregate mean score (3.23) of 'Farm-to-table Experience', tourists' consider this component to be statistically significant. The dimension introduces tourists to regional culinary specialties and food traditions. Tourists are more interested in eating regional food. Farmers' markets and neighbourhood hotels increasingly provide meals prepared with local ingredients to enhance the dining experience. Tourists purchase directly from them. Such locally produced ingredients are considered to be better, fresher, and safer to eat.[43]

Multiple regression analysis results shows that educational value is contributing most towards the overall satisfaction. The dimension 'Authenticity' was found to have a beta $\beta = 0.12$ and a p value < 0.05, which is extremely important for the overall satisfaction of tourists. This analysis shows that a one-unit increase in authenticity would result in a 0.12-unit rise in tourists' overall level of satisfaction. Authenticity promotes a sense of emotional attachment between the tourist and the place. It also fosters credibility and confidence among the visitors. This dimension may encourage a positive outlook towards the travel destination, which raises satisfaction with the entire aspect of the agritourism experience. With a beta $\beta = 0.21$ and $p < 0.01$, the factor 'Economic Contribution' possessed a low weight for tourists' satisfaction. This may be due

to the fact that tourists are of the opinion that rural communities should utilise the chance to expand their economic activity beyond conventional agriculture through agritourism, thereby lowering economic risks, boosting the diversity of the local economy. The dimension 'Sustainability' with a beta β= 0.16 and p <0.05, reveals a positive and favourable influence on tourist satisfaction because the value of beta is positive. The factor 'Recreational activities' were found to have a beta β= 0.15 and p< 0.05, which is highly significant for the satisfaction of tourists.

According to the results, perception of authenticity, perception of educational value, perception of sustainability, perception of economic contribution, perception of recreational activities, perception of relaxation and well-being, and perception of farm-to-table experience are the most important and relevant factors to explain tourists' total satisfaction with agritourism. According to the study by Pawar[72] on the perception of tourists on agritourism in Maharashtra, it was clearly identified that tourists gave more importance to participating in farming activities, followed by recreational activities such as enjoying the environment, participating in rural games, and relaxing. They gave the least importance to cultural values. Furthermore, result may indicate that tourist value other factors—like leisure, farming, or environmental experiences—over face-to-face cultural contact. This result suggests that, in this situation, tourists may not be primarily motivated by cultural exchange. This might have an impact on how politicians decide to promote agritourism.[73,74] Resources could be better used to improve buildings, environmental sustainability, or agricultural experiences rather than cultural programming.[75-77] This change in emphasis may better suit the preferences of visitors, guaranteeing greater satisfaction and the long-term growth of agritourism in the area.

Conclusion

The current investigation shows that out of the eight dimensions extracted from the factor analysis, seven dimensions—authenticity, educational value, sustainability, economic contribution, recreational activities, relaxation and wellness, and farm-to-table experience—significantly and positively contribute to the satisfaction of tourists. The factor analysis has resulted in identifying eight major factors which are influencing the tourist perception such as authenticity, educational value, cultural exchange, sustainability, economic contribution, recreational activities, relaxation and wellness and farm-to-table experience. Mostly, younger people are more interested in the agri-tourism. In terms of overall satisfaction, the factor economic contribution has the highest mean score. However, the result of multiple linear regression model shows that the factor educational value is the most contributing factor towards the satisfaction of the tourist. Regression model also shows that all the factors positively contribute towards the satisfaction of the tourist.

From this, it can be inferred that tourists feel satisfied with the majority of the research area's characteristics. The satisfaction of tourists towards a destination increases when they feel the natural environment and culture are authentic. Farm experiences are varied and experimental in agritourism. As it may include the friendliness and commitment to providing excellent customer service, the variety of rural facilities, the farm's security, and its aesthetic appeal. Additionally, it has been shown that the 'cultural exchange' dimension has a comparably lower aggregated mean value and thereby contributes statistically insignificantly to the model of tourist satisfaction. When visitors come across artificial or commercialised cultural experiences, they could view the cultural component of agritourism as fake or unauthentic. When a cultural encounter seems forced or lacks a genuine connection to the locals, tourists may get discouraged and unconvinced. Tourists may get discouraged and sceptical if the cultural interaction is produced or has no relation to the local community.

At the same time, differences in cultural norms, customs, and traditions might result in misinterpretation and discomfort. This might negatively affect the opinions of those in the cultural exchange dimension. The experience of the tourist should be given more consideration by the local government officials and residents while building agritourism amenities in a conventional agricultural manner. This is an important consideration for the growth of sustainable agritourism. While most aspects of the research area are praised by tourists, some aspects are criticised. These include the fact that agritourism

in the study area enhances knowledge of agricultural heritage, preserves it, raises the value of food production and its environmental impact, promotes respect for cultural diversity through interpersonal interaction, and highlights the importance of ethical tourism. It is suggested that the study take a number of measures to boost tourist satisfaction in the study region and guarantee the tourist destination's long-term *sustainability.* A few measures are.

- To encourage agritourism tasks, the infrastructure, such as roads, installing adequate signs, thereby enhancing accessibility to farms and agricultural lands.
- Supporting farmers to expand their conventional agricultural practises, such as setting up farm stays and agricultural-level workshops,
- Encourage cooperation between local tourism businesses, farmers, and other district stakeholders.
- To carry out agritourism -related research and development initiatives, collaborate with educational establishments like universities or technical schools.
- Establish supporting laws, rules, and incentives for the growth of agritourism by working with high-level government officials.

Agritourism can be considered a method of promoting sustainable tourism and other activities in the rural region with the goal of raising the standard of living of rural populations, particularly through generating greater income for those who are employed in agriculture. Agritourism also contributes to the preservation of the rural eco-system since it forms the basis of the local tourism sector. It is crucial that some development monies be allocated to the creation of new social forests and the preservation of those that already exist.

The goal of the current study is to determine how tourists perceive and respond to agritourism, making a substantial addition to the field of tourist research in terms of how tourists view attraction factors and their associated quality of a region, contributing to tourist satisfaction. The research findings reveal that both of the above features are required to boost visitors' satisfaction, and any flaws will lead to unfavourable perceptions of agritourism. The conclusion drawn from this study may be used by policymakers in other tourist destinations to improve tourist well-being.

Limitation and Scope for Further Research

The study suggested a measure for evaluating how much tourists are satisfied with the agritourism of a rural district. At the same time, the study merely represents the starting point of the comprehensive investigation that will be required to enhance it in the future. Moreover, the study may have limitations due to the small sample size of tourists who participated in the survey, which may not accurately reflect the broad spectrum of tourists who visit the region. Thus, the generalizability of the results may be constrained by the limited sample size, which may leave out specific types of tourists' experiences and perspectives. Since the study is restricted to a specific area, the findings may not be applicable to other agritourism destinations, as each area may have distinctive qualities, attractions, or drawbacks that may not be relevant to other places. Because the data collection period for the research is short, it is possible that seasonal fluctuations in tourist satisfaction may not be recorded. Future studies can be undertaken to gain a deeper knowledge of tourist satisfaction through longitudinal studies that monitor tourist satisfaction, trends, and variations over a longer period of time. Furthermore, how diverse cultural settings affect the tourist experience by comparing their satisfaction with agritourism can be investigated. This can help us comprehend cultural norms, standards, and desires more deeply and how they affect tourist perception and attitude. Opportunities exist for research that takes into account the viewpoints of different agritourism stakeholders, such as farmers, locals, and lawmakers. By examining their views, expectations, and issues, a more comprehensive understanding of the factors impacting tourists' well-being, satisfaction, and overall effectiveness of agritourism activities may be acquired.

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Ethics Statement

This research did not involve human participants, animal subjects, or any material that requires ethical approval.

Author Contributions

- **Reshma Vattekkad:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis and investigation,
- **Pradeesh Kunchu:** Methodology, Writing - original draft preparation
- **Mohanadasan Thottathil:** Writing - original draft preparation, review and editing, Supervision

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