



**TourismWatch**

**KABANI**

The other direction

# **Tourism and The Human Right to Water**

Challenges for Change  
in Kerala (India)

# Water Is A Human Right

- “ The human right to drinking water is fundamental to life and health. Sufficient and safe drinking water is a precondition for the realization of human rights.”

*- United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, "General Comment" on the Right to Water*

# Water Is A Human Right

“The human right to water entitles everyone to

- sufficient,
- affordable,
- physically accessible,
- safe
- and acceptable

water for personal and domestic uses.”

*- United Nations Committee on  
Economic, Cultural and Social Rights,  
“General Comment” on the Right to Water*

# Water Is A Human Right

“An adequate amount of safe water is necessary

- to prevent death from dehydration,
- to reduce the risk of water-related disease
- to provide for consumption, cooking, personal and domestic hygienic requirements”

*- United Nations Committee on  
Economic, Cultural and Social Rights,  
“General Comment” on the Right to Water*

# Water and Poverty Eradication

The **Millennium Development Goals** call for

- reducing the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day
- reducing the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water to half the 1990 level by 2015

Ensuring access to safe drinking water is an integral part of the fight against poverty!

# Tourism and Poverty Alleviation

- “Tourism can contribute significantly to **rural development, agricultural transformation, community enrichment and social empowerment, particularly for women.**
- Developed states, agencies, enterprises and travelers themselves must adopt a **proactive approach to tourism as a catalyst for poverty alleviation.**”

*World Tourism Organization (WTO)*

# Sustainable Tourism

“Sustainable tourism should:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.”

*World Tourism Organization (WTO)*

# Sustainable Tourism

“Sustainable tourism should:

2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.”

*World Tourism Organization (WTO)*



# Sustainable Tourism

“Sustainable tourism should:

3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.”

*World Tourism Organization (WTO)*

# Tourism, Poverty and Safe Water

- For tourism to be sustainable, it must contribute to alleviating poverty.
- To alleviate poverty, access to safe drinking water for local people must be ensured.

# Tourism, Poverty and Safe Water

- Tourism should contribute to improving people's access to safe drinking water.

However, the opposite  
is often the case!

# Tourism and The Human Right to Water

in  
Kerala,  
India



# Water in India

- In availability of water India ranks 133rd in a list of 180 countries.
- At least 200 million Indians do not have access to safe and clean water.
- An estimated 90 % of the country's water resources are polluted with untreated industrial and domestic waste, pesticides, and fertilizers.
- About 1.5 million children under the age of five die every year from water-borne diseases.
- Water scarcity is the single biggest threat to food production.

# India's Obligation to Guarantee Access to Clean Water

- India being a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is obligated to ensure access to clean water “equitably and without discrimination”
- In India, the right to life includes “the right to enjoyment of pollution-free water and air for full enjoyment of life”

# Kerala Tourism

- **International Tourist Arrivals in Kerala**

290,000 in 2003

360,000 in 2004

24 % growth 2003-04

Kerala tourism constitutes  
10 % of total foreign  
tourist arrivals in India.

- **Domestic Tourist Arrivals in Kerala**

5,870,000 in 2003

< 6,200,000 in 2004

5.5 % growth 2003-2004

*-The Economic Times,  
8.2.2005*

# Water Problems in Kerala Tourism

- **Beaches:** water pollution, commodification of water, ground water depletion, water scarcity
- **Backwaters:** Pollution, drinking water scarcity
- **Mountains/Hill Stations:** drought
- **Pilgrimage Centres:** inadequate facilities for pilgrims, drinking water scarcity
- **Amusement Parks:** high water consumption, pollution, privatisation of water



# Water Problems in Kerala Tourism

- Case 1:  
Backwater Tourism in  
Alappuzha/Kuttanadu
- Case 2:  
Veega Land  
Amusement Park  
near Ernakulam



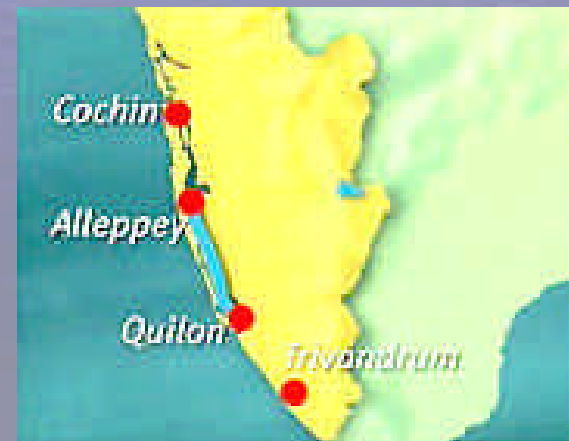
# **Tourism and The Human Right to Water**

## **Challenges for Change**

- 1. Backwater Tourism in  
Alappuzha/Kuttanadu  
Kerala (India)**

# The Kuttanadu Backwaters

- A waterlogged stretch of about 110,000 ha of lakes, lagoons, rivers and canals
- Situated between the towns of Kochi (Cochin), Kottayam, Alappuzha (Alleppey) and Kollam (Quilon)



# The Kuttanadu Backwaters

- 50,000 ha are 60 to 220 cm below sea level
- One of the 'rice bowls' of Kerala
- 4 major rivers - Pampa, Meenachil, Achankovil and Manimala - flow into the region



# The Kuttanadu Backwaters

“Kuttanadu life is very much related to water. The livelihood of the people, e.g. agriculture and fishing activities, depends on the quality of the water here.”

- *R. Visakhan, panchayat president, Kainakari Gram Panchayat*



# Fishing in Kuttanadu – A Major Source of Income

- Over 10,000 people live on fishing
- 580 tonnes of fish and prawns are harvested annually on the Southern part of the Thaneermukkom bund alone



# Kuttanadu – A Fragile Wetland Eco-System

- 150 fish species
- 3 fresh water prawns
- 4 molluscs



# Water – A Human Need

“More than 80 per cent of the people in Kuttanadu rely on the contaminated canal water for their daily water requirements. About 40 per cent of them use the water without boiling it first.”

- *Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM), Kozhikode, quoted by M. Suchitra*





# Water Pollution in Kuttanadu

“Pollution levels in the backwaters of Kerala are rising as the number of houseboats increases, since fuel refilling is done without proper care and sewage and kitchen wastewater are released directly into the waters.”

- K.K. Mustafah

*In: The Hindu Business Line, 29*

*August 2002*



# Houseboat Waste

"The houseboats are a big menace now. They are discharging human excreta, condoms and other waste into the lake. The bottom of the lake is full of plastics carry bags and bottles. The industry doesn't have any social commitment."

*- R. Visakhan, panchayat president, Kainakari Gram Panchayat*



# Houseboats – Oil and Kerosene Pollution

“A film of oil has been fast spreading over the water in the lake. It is alarmingly thick in Punnamada and Kumarakom where the largest number of houseboats anchor.”

- K.G. Padmakumar,  
Kumarakom Regional Agricultural  
Research Station  
In: Indian Express, 24 January,  
2005



# Two-Stroke Engines Pollute Too Much

- “Oil and fuel from two-stroke engines is being released through motorized boating activity.
- Between 25 and 30 percent of the fuel and required oil that conventional two-strokes use is ejected unburned through the tailpipe and into the marine ecosystem.”

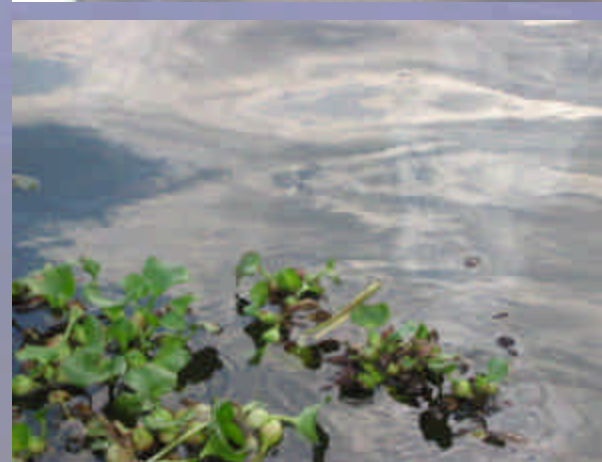
- *Bluewater Network*



# Petrochemicals – A Serious Environmental Threat

“Petrochemicals released from two-stroke engines float on the surface microlayer and settle within the estuarine and shallow ecosystems of bays, lakes, rivers, and oceans, where marine life is youngest and most vulnerable. These areas are the base of the food chain, inhabited by fish eggs, larvae, algae, crab, lobster, shrimp, and zoo-plankton.”

- *Bluewater Network*



# Dead Fish – Victims of Pollution

“The gills, through which the fish breathes, are coated with oil. The fish have been showing a tendency to migrate en masse to the area of the lake where the film is thin or absent. If the situation goes unchecked, fish and other aquatic organisms will perish soon.”



- K.G. Padmakumar, Kumarakom Regional Agricultural Research Station  
In: Indian Express, 24 January, 2005

# Birds - Loss of diversity and population at Vembanad Lake

- Decline in bird species from 189 to 66 (in 2003)
- Bird population halved within one decade



# Boat Traffic in Kuttanadu





# The Flipside of the Tourism Coin

"We have to really look into the statistics - the foreign exchange, local people employed in tourism, subsidies given by government. We can see that this tourism is not profitable and does not help the people. Here tourism destroys the traditional employment like fishing and agriculture by polluting the water."

*- R. Visakhan,  
panchayat president,  
Kainakari Gram Panchayat*



# Carrying Capacity Exceeded

"At present there are 400 houseboats operating in Alappuzha itself. The government should consider the carrying capacity and should bring some regulation to prevent the number from increasing further."

*- R. Visakhan,  
panchayat president,  
Kainakari Gram Panchayat*



# Heavy Houseboat Traffic

“Outboard engines are creating most of the pollution. Fish and mussels are not in a condition to eat because of the kerosene content. Sometimes I also can't row my boat because of the heavy traffic of houseboats and tourist boats.”

- Pavithran, ferryman, Kainakari



# Livelihood of Fishermen at Stake

“Husbands have blamed their wives for the kerosene taste of the food. They might have spoiled the food while cooking. Now we know that the kerosene taste is from the fish itself. We are not able to sell fish because of this kerosene. The houseboats are threatening our livelihood. The fish stock is also reducing.”

- K. Raju, fisherman, Kainakari



# Livelihood of Fishermen at Stake

“We have taken a loan from the bank for the small fishing boat and net. Now we are unable to repay the loan because we are not getting enough catch and sale.

At night, houseboats are anchoring on the lake. They are destroying the fishing nets, which is also causing conflicts.”

- *Sibichan, fisherman, Kainakari*



# Agriculture Adversely Affected

"The houseboats are disturbing the agricultural activities. Kerosene and oil are spreading to the paddy fields and are adversely affecting the rice cultivation.

Government authorities are ignoring the plea of the people to prevent pollution and supply drinking water. Government should bring some regulation!"

- *Madusoodanan, president of the Rice Cultivators Collective, Valiyakari*



# Agriculture Adversely Affected

"Our paddy fields are in a very bad shape due to the pollution. We are not getting agricultural workers, because they are afraid to work in the polluted paddy fields due to health concerns. I am also suffering from skin diseases because of the long contact with the contaminated water."

- *Thankamani, local resident,  
Valiyakari*



# Scarcity of Drinking Water

“There is no adequate drinking water supply in this area. People are still using the ‘kayal’ (lake) water. The pipe on this side of the river is new. But there won’t be water until 5.00 p.m, and then only until 9.00 a.m.”

- *Krishnankutti,  
local resident, Kainakari*





# Increasing Burden on Women

"Earlier the water in the lake was very good, we took drinking water from there. Now it is very bad because of the pollution from house boats and other tourist boats. There are no pipe water connections. I am responsible for collecting the water and doing the household jobs. I have to go too far, by boat, to collect drinking water. This is burdening my work."

*- Lillikutti,  
local resident,  
Kainakari*



# No More Privacy

“Earlier we used to take bath on both sides of the canal. Now tourists are taking photographs from the boat without our permission and intrude our privacy. Now we are taking bath in the night.”



- Thankamani, local resident, Valiyakari

# **Tourism and The Human Right to Water**

Challenges for Change

## **2. Veega Land Amusement Park near Ernakulam Kerala (India)**

# Veega Land Amusement Park

- One of the largest amusement parks in South India
- Inaugurated in April 2000
- At Pallikara, 14 km from Ernakulam
- 300 feet above sea level
- Amongst 24 acres of “surpassingly grand and incomparably idyllic environs”



# Veega Land Amusement Park

- *“What’s in?”*
- *“What’s around?”*



# What's in?

- 4000-5000 people visit the park daily
- During vacations and weekends the number of daily visitors rises to an average of 6,000



# Veega Land Amusement Park

“So get set for a memorable experience. And be prepared to expect the unexpected, in a land where the fun never stops!!”

- [www.veegaland.com](http://www.veegaland.com)



# Veega Land Amusement Park

- “All Fun, All Day Long  
For every one”  
- [www.veegaland.com](http://www.veegaland.com)



- For every one ... ???



# Veega Land Amusement Park

- **What's in?**

“Veega Land employs the most modern technology to maintain water quality and purity that meet international norms. We have a 7-stage filtration plant, a fully-fledged water- testing lab, and onsite personnel for monitoring.”

- [www.veegaland.com](http://www.veegaland.com)

- **What's around?**



# What's around?

"The Park is discharging a large amount of polluted water to the paddy fields behind and very close to our house. This is polluting our drinking water. Before the inception of the park, the quality of our well water was very good. We had to abandon our old well and had to dig a new one."

– *Varghese Kulangara,  
a resident living very close  
to the park*



# Veega Land Amusement Park

- *What's in?*

"Veega Land is replete with safety and hygiene features that meet the most stringent international norms. Its filtration and purification systems are amongst the most advanced available."

- [www.veegaland.com](http://www.veegaland.com)

- *What's around?*



# What's around?

"No workers are ready to work in these fields. They are full of dirty water. I used to go to the field to collecting grass for my cows. Now it is impossible. I'm suffering from some skin disease on my legs which is itching."

*– Varghese Kulangara,  
a resident living very close  
to the park*



# What's around?

"After inception of the park, we had give up our agricultural activities. Now it is impossible to do rice and other cultivation here. We also lost our coconut trees because of polluted water.

The health of our small child is also threatened by this pollution."

*– Mary Varghese,  
a resident living very close to  
the park*



# Veega Land Amusement Park

- *What's in?*

**“Water quality standards:**

At Veega Land water quality is manually tested every hour to back up a computerized monitoring system. ... If chemical contaminants approach unacceptable levels, the monitoring system will automatically dispense chemicals to maintain the prescribed water quality standards.”

- [www.veegaland.com](http://www.veegaland.com)

- *What's around?*



# What's around?

“The Panchayat has received several complaints from local people on the contamination of residential well water which they attributed to the discharge of chemically treated water and sewages from the park. And which is causing many diseases.”

– Adv. Raju Joseph,  
standing committee chairperson,  
Kunnathunadu Gram Panchayat



# What's around?



"I am suffering from some skin disease, very similar to Varghese, which I think is due to the contact with this polluted water."

– *Mary Baby,*  
*a resident living very close to*  
*the park*



# Veega Land Amusement Park

- *What's in?*

**“Water quality equipment:**

All water used in our attractions is processed through five different filter plants. 30 lakh liters of water can be purified and disinfected in a span of 8 hours.”

- [www.veegaland.com](http://www.veegaland.com)

- *What's around?*



The park reportedly consumes a daily average of 800,000 – 1,000,000 l of water!

# What's around?

“The park is extracting a large amount of water without any costs involved. They are taking the water from the canal, where water is provided by the irrigation department for agricultural purposes.”

– *Baby Joseph,  
local resident and political party  
worker*



# What's in?

19.5 lakh people visited Veega Land between April 2000 and March 2003.

- *www.veegaland.com, March 2004*

The gate charges for adults and children are Rs 350 and Rs 260 respectively on weekends and Rs 280 and Rs 210 on weekdays.

- *www.veegaland.com, Feb. 2005*

The park achieved its break even point within three years.

- *Kumar, Assistant Manager (PR), Veega Land, 16 Feb. 2004*



# What's around?

- “The park is causing health problems to the local people by discharging polluted and chemically treated water into the surroundings. The park is not paying entertainment and additional taxes to the local panchayat. Now this dispute is under consideration of Supreme Court of India. The Panchayath is demanding the entertainment and additional entertainment tax as per the Local Authorities Entertainment Tax Act 1961.”

– *Sali Raju, panchayat president, Kunnathunadu Gram Panchayat*



# What's ... out of reach?

"Around Rs. 15 crores (one crore = 10 millions) is due to us as entertainment tax.

For a small underdeveloped panchayat like ours which doesn't have many other revenue options, it's a very big amount that could be utilised for various development activities."

– Sali Raju, panchayat president,  
Kunnathunadu Gram Panchayat



# What's in – Awards? – What's around?

## **Kerala State Tourism Awards 2001-02**

**“Individual / Agency who has implemented the most eco-Friendly Tourism project in the State**

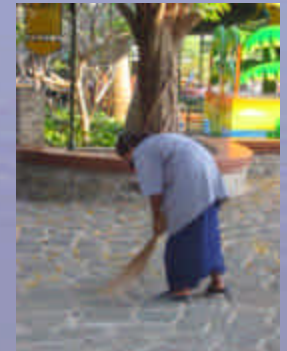
VEEGA LAND, Ernakulam. Amusement park providing hi-tech land and water based rides. It follows good eco friendly practices facility for treatment 25 lakhs liters of water in just 8 hours, to large sewage treatment plants an incinerator and chimney to treat solid waste and maintenance of the premises in healthy and hygienic condition are main features. They also received pollution control award for the award 2001. The award is in recognition of their best eco friendly practices in major tourism projects.”

- [www.keralatourism.org/mis/award/award\\_release.htm](http://www.keralatourism.org/mis/award/award_release.htm), Feb. 2005

# What's ... ?

## Veega Land Amusement Park

"FAQs: You ask. We answer"



***Who really benefits from tourism?***