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Luxury Yacht Tourism in Fragile Environments: Sustainability & Resilience Strategies for Indian Islands

Abstract

Yacht tourism is a form of leisure travel that involves renting or owning a yacht for vacation purposes. It is a luxurious way to explore coastal regions, islands, and remote locations accessible primarily by water. This study, from a resident's perspective, aims to understand how sustainability and resilience strategies can be framed for sustainable yacht tourism. A qualitative approach was adopted, wherein data were collected through interviews in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India. The study aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, tourism operators, and stakeholders to enhance sustainability and resilience in yacht tourism, ensuring long-term benefits for both the local community and the environment.

Keywords: sustainability, yacht tourism, community resilience, tourism environment, tourism industry, islands

1. Introduction

The plenitude of natural and historical treasures lying in India is now, after years of significant initiatives under programs like Incredible India, slowly carving their way into the minds and hearts of travellers struck with wanderlust (Thirumaran & Raghav, 2017). However, due to a lack of appreciation for the magnificent natural treasures within India's national boundaries, the opportunities for exploring and developing the abundant possibilities have not been properly conceived, let alone investigated (Gurung et al., 2022). The archipelago of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is located approximately 1,400 kilometres east of mainland India, or, in other words, a mere two-hour flight from Kolkata. Only about 32 islands out of more than 572 are inhabited, and out of those, only a handful were open to the public until now. The Andaman Islands cover an area of 6,408 square miles (Forest Survey of India, 2019). A largely unexplored and virgin destination like the Andaman Islands possesses its unique attraction. There are numerous other possibilities for adventure junkies to get their daily fix through activities such as yacht stays on the islands, snorkelling, sea walks, sport fishing, and many more (Elsadi & Hekal, 2024; Fotiadis, Rice & Hiyasat, 2023). Governments and local communities are the primary beneficiaries of yacht tourism, with the former benefiting indirectly through taxation and the latter directly. The benefits of yacht tourism also extend to all stakeholders of a yachting destination (Zubak et al., 2014; Tarquini-Poli & Klaus, 2024). The tourism industry is perhaps the only significant opportunity for the economic development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, despite being still in its early stages (Banu, 2016). In 2022, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands received 235,100 local visitors. This was an increase from 2021 when there were 126,238 local visitors. The all-time high was in 2019 when there were 505,398 local visitors (CEIC, 2023). Much of the vessel inventory in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, owned mainly by private players, is not registered with government bodies; therefore, it is difficult

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to track the number of private boats and vessels for leisure in the Andamans (Dung & Rajamohan, 2018). Andaman lacks a clearly defined policy from a legal perspective when it comes to attracting foreign capital, particularly regarding investments in appealing locations and essential infrastructure, which are necessary for the development of tourism in the region (Kumar, 2017). The top countries in foreign tourist arrivals in Andaman are Israel, the UK, and Germany (Dung & Rajamohan, 2018). Yacht businesses earn revenues through yacht charters, consultation, and payments received for crew services; onshore port services from maintenance, repair, and re-fuelling (Kalemdaroglu et al., 2004; Yao, Zheng & Parmak, 2022; Hennink & Kaiser, 2019) and all associated businesses in the area from tourist expenditures on food, road-transport, and souvenirs, etc. all contributing to the local and national economy. (Sevinç and Güzel, 2017; Chi and Liu, 2023). When planning for resilience, the government must approach the issue from a planning perspective, and the concepts of equilibrium and stability should be viewed as illusions (Lew, 2014). Moreover, associated carbon dioxide emissions with yachting hinder the tourism sector's progress, as climate impacts are increasingly diminishing the appeal of these destinations (Krishnan et al., 2023; Sariisik & Ozbay, 2023; Moradi et al., 2024). Community readiness for sustainable tourism development is high in terms of economic, social, cultural, environmental, and symbolic capital aspects (Sayuti, 2023). The key points to consider include planning for crisis management, adopting adaptive business practices, staff induction and training, and business continuity insurance (Orchiston, 2013). Yachting involves experiencing nature in proximity. Moreover, it is recognized as a sustainable form of tourism (Fuchs, 2023; Fakfare & Wattanacharoensil, 2023). However, massive tourism development in the small islands could reduce water quality and increase vulnerability. Accordingly, integrated tourism management, along with consideration of the environment, waters, and land, will be necessary to develop sustainable tourism (Kurniawan, 2023). Hence, this study aims to understand how sustainability and resilience strategies can be framed for sustainable yacht tourism through the resident's perspective.

Table 1
No. of Tourist Visited A & N in 2024

Sl.No.	Month/year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
1	January 2024	41241	1578	42819
2	February 2024	37145	1636	38781
3	March 2024	40660	1537	42197
4	April 2024	50939	739	51678
5	May 2024	73222	1279	74501
6	June 2024	42679	349	43028
7	July 2024	18273	370	18643
8	August 2024	33254	513	33767
9	September 2024	49932	383	50315
Total		387345	8384	395729

Source: https://www.andamantourism.gov.in/tourist_data.php

2. Research methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed for this study. Qualitative research offers a deep understanding of respondents' emotions, providing valuable insights into the studied phenomenon (Berkwits & Inui, 1998; Tolkach et al., 2019; Kunjuraman, 2022; Yeh, 2020). The questionnaire was based on previous studies (Sevinç & Güzel, 2016; Yao et al., 2022). Thirty-five respondents selected through purposive sampling were deemed suitable for the study. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2019), 24 interviews are adequate for a comprehensive understanding of an issue. The respondents selected to answer the questionnaire questions were community members involved in tourism-related activities in the research area. The respondents comprised 18 males and 17 females, aged between 20 and 51. The data from the interviews were analyzed using NVivo 14. Three key themes were obtained through the thematic analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and imported into NVivo 12, which facilitated the identification of meaningful codes and themes from the data, ultimately leading to the study's key findings. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis, a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gavin, 2008; Brunt et al., 2017).

3.1. Visible environmental footprints

Residents are concerned about the impact on marine life and coastal areas, which are a direct source of income and livelihood for them. There are adverse effects of yacht tourism on local quality of life, including noise, overcrowding, and disruption of daily activities.

"We have observed a significant increase in pollution and waste-related challenges with the rise of yacht tourism in our region. This is deeply concerning, as it not only threatens the fragile ecosystem but also disrupts our daily lives, affecting the quality of our environment and the well-being of our community. The growing waste and environmental degradation demand immediate attention to safeguard both nature and the livelihoods dependent on it." (Respondent 3)

"The impact on marine life is deeply troubling. Our coastal waters are not only a source of natural beauty but also the foundation of our livelihood. Any harm to the delicate marine ecosystem directly jeopardizes our income, disrupts our traditional way of life, and poses long-term risks to the sustainability of our coastal communities. Protecting these waters is not just an environmental concern; it's a matter of survival for us." (Respondent 8)

3.2. Demand for resilience frameworks

Residents emphasized the importance of implementing resilience strategies to mitigate the disruptions caused by tourism (Lew, 2014). Enhanced infrastructure would not only address immediate tourism-related pressures but also ensure long-term sustainability and community well-being.

"To handle the disruptions tourism brings, we need better infrastructure. It would help us manage the impact more effectively and maintain our quality of life." (Respondent 12)

"Preparedness for emergencies is essential. With so many visitors, we need strong disaster response plans in place to protect both locals and tourists in case of unforeseen events." (Respondent 23)

3.3. Inclusive sustainability practices

Tourism serves as a vital source of funding for national development and sustains local livelihoods in small islands, particularly through sun-sand tourism (Hegedus et al., 2024; Wolf et al., 2024). However, associated carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions hinder the sector's progress, as climate impacts are increasingly diminishing the appeal of these destinations. Locals suggest that to improve sustainability, eco-friendly facilities and regulations need to be implemented (Fakfare & Wattanacharoensil, 2023).

"If we genuinely want tourism to be sustainable, it's imperative that we prioritize the development of eco-friendly facilities and implement stricter environmental regulations. These measures are not just optional—they are essential to preserving the delicate balance of our natural ecosystems." (Respondent 9)

"We need to be more informed about government policies on tourism. Our voices should count when it comes to sustainability practices, especially in the yacht tourism sector. As key stakeholders, we have firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities, and our participation"

in decision-making processes is essential to ensure that tourism develops in a way that benefits both the environment and the local community” (Respondent 16)

4. Conclusion and research implications

India's Andaman Islands have tremendous tourism potential, which can significantly contribute to the regional economy. The Indian government has established goals for itself that will further support a sustainable development model. It also aims to encourage tourism that prioritizes quality visitors over quantity. The government is seeking “high-value, low-volume”, environmentally sustainable and eco-friendly tourism practices. It is evident that in the current scenario, the tourism sector must reflect the cultural philosophy of the islands and be sustainability oriented. Tourism should help strike a balance that harmonizes the ecological system and benefits the local population.

The future of tourism in these islands is intrinsically tied to the effectiveness of preservation and protection efforts undertaken by governing bodies and the active participation of the local community. Research highlights that the niche segment of yacht tourism when developed with a strong focus on sustainability, holds immense potential to deliver long-term and meaningful returns on investment. Beyond its economic impact, this archipelago can serve as a strategic gateway to mainland India, attracting travelers seeking deeper exploration and cultural immersion. Such initiatives can significantly bolster foreign exchange earnings, stimulate local economic growth, enhance community well-being, and create numerous employment opportunities. By striking a balance between ecological preservation and economic development, the region can establish itself as a model for sustainable tourism in India and beyond.

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