

Untravel Weekends: Kabani – The other direction

If you love travelling but aren't sure how to do it responsibly, and leave an impact on the society while you enjoy yourself, Kabani is for you!

Named after the Kabani River, one of the rivers in Kerala flowing in the “other direction”, Kabani attempts to facilitate an alternative outlook towards travel and tourism. It works towards a better tourism model in India, finding its basis in local people, focusing on the socio-economic security of the people and sustainability of the destination.

Sumesh Mangalassery from the organization talks about Kabani, responsible travel, their journey and much more.



KABANI focuses on sustainable socio-economic development of

villages and the conservation of natural resources.

TA: Tell us the story behind Kabani.

Sumesh: We envision Kabani as an organization working on tourism issues in the areas of research, and campaigning against the negative impacts of tourism on local communities and natural resources. After many years of opposing the malpractices in tourism, we decided on proposing a better and fair travel which can benefit the local communities by adding to their regular income from farming and at the same time [remain] totally in tune with the environment. Hence our first tourism project at Bamboo Village, Thrikkaipetta, Wayanad was developed in association with Uravu, an NGO based at Wayanad.

The second project was launched in Alleppey, involving fishing and farming communities in the backwaters and coastal areas. By the end of this year we would be in a position where we can offer a fair package of diverse travel experience to our guests across south India.

These programs cannot be just limited to be termed as tourism projects, but has a responsibility to sustainably develop the village as a whole. As tourism researchers and campaigners against unsustainable tourism, we realized the need for an alternative to mainstream tourism that benefits people. We want the communities involved to be creative, self-reliant and responsible for their own living conditions and socio-economic security through active participation in development activities. Organic farming, coir processing, fishing, sculptures, weaving, bamboo handicrafts, food processing units, home stays and tourism activities are all included in the program.

TA: How do you look at responsible

travel? And how is it implemented at Kabani?

Sumesh: As proposers of responsible travel we believe and implement a set of practices which ensures the sustainability of the program:

i) Community driven Initiatives

The basic principles behind the program where the community lies in the centre as decision makers and not just suppliers of produces.

Kabani, as an organization focusing on sustainable socio-economic development of villages and the conservation of natural resources, continues to share this philosophy by promoting more villages at different locations across India, which is in tune with their vision on tourism that it should always benefit the local people neither diluting their culture nor harming the environment.



The travellers are accommodated in family homes, sharing their hosts' daily routine and getting to learn about their lives.

ii) Benefit sharing with communities (Families and Village as whole)

For the locals, this is a way to decentralize tourism and directly benefit from guest's holiday budgets. As their homes can cater for a few additional guests, the initial investment being very low or rather nil. In addition, a benefit sharing scheme makes sure that the entire village has its fair share. Half of the income from accommodation stays with the host families, and another 30 percent goes to a village fund to provide professional trainings, support youth and old age projects, development of village level entrepreneurship, the annual Jackfruit Festival and the ongoing development of the tourism project. The remaining 20 percent cover the expenses of the organization KABANI and its sustainable tourism activities.

iii) Placing local People at the centre of cultural exchange

The project caters to travellers who look for a very personal and ethical way to stay. The travellers are accommodated in family homes, sharing their hosts' daily routine, getting to learn about their lives first-hand and tasting the wonderful flavors of home-cooked Keralite dishes. Here you find exchange of more values and culture than just that of words or currencies. The hosts welcomes the guests to their homes being guests of the god. Here the hospitality does not begin and end merely with food being served to you and a room provided; but with families sharing their time and lives with you with no intrusion to privacies.



Kabani also view the conversation of the environment and our natural resources as an integral part of the initiative.

iv) Environment conservation and enhancement

We also view the conversation of the environment and our natural resources as an integral part of the initiative. A set of principles evolved with the values of the community including the clear understanding of the waste management and effective utilization of village resources makes the Bamboo village shower harmony and becomes an example to the neighboring villages.

v) Tourism not a development model but a facilitator

Here we propose tourism not as an alternative to the traditional income sources, but as a additional source of income which can enhance the living conditions of the village communities, such as farmers, coastal communities etc. Organic farming and other enterprises ensure sustainable income generation, whereas tourism provides a complementary income source. The investment of the in tourism has been kept to the

minimum, since we don't want it to replace the traditional livelihood means as the main source of livelihood.



Kabani act as a additional source of income which can enhance the living conditions of the village communities.

TA: What has been the impact of your venture – on the local people, environment, the place itself, traveller sensitization and anything else they' d

like to stress on.

Sumesh: The “Bamboo Village” at Thrikkaipetta, now does not struggle much for the crop markets to decide their fate. Also today a village that was once never spotted in the tourist locations on the maps of even the state has today become one the much cited locations on the global tourist map.

The training programs have helped to improve the general waste management in the village. A mere house wife who didn't have much opportunities to know about the other parts of the world is today equipped with better communication skills which helps them consciously interact with the guests and has become active community members benefiting the over all growth of the community.

Children in the village are getting an opportunity to interact with the guests which helps them to have a better understanding about the various career options.



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TA: Can you share experiences/anecdotes with us from travellers who've visited?

Sumesh: The visitors mostly leave the place being inspired and overwhelmed with the beauty of the place and the hospitality of the villagers. From the bus ride to the resort to the food served and stories about social initiatives by Kabani, everything comes as a package to the travellers which make this place even more desirable.

TA: What do you see as the future of responsible travel and sustainable tourism in India?

Sumesh: The percentage of Indian middle class opting and who can afford travelling is very high in today's circumstances and the number is increasing. There is a need to create an awareness about travel responsibilities to them and at the same time give them more options for safe and responsible travel. But unfortunately many of the mainstream travel companies use the term responsible tourism to serve their vested interest or sometimes as a marketing ploy. More community driven initiatives with a clear responsible tourism principles has to be evolved. Also proper state governance in terms of adequate legislations are inevitable.

Tourism should help sustainable development giving travel and communities a chance to grow.



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develop the village as a whole.

Pic courtesy: Kabani Tours

This article is a part of The Alternative's [UnTravel Festival Special](#) that aims to get you to celebrate regional festivals like a local through our travel calendar experiences, recommendations from our experts and travel writers along with contests and Twitter chats.

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