

## Sustainable Hospitality Practices in Rural Tourism Destinations in Kalaburagi District of Karnataka State

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines sustainable hospitality practices within the rural tourism landscape of Kalaburagi district, Karnataka. Sustainable hospitality integrates economic, social, and environmental strategies to safeguard natural resources, empower local communities, and ensure long-term viability. Key environmental initiatives include waste reduction, water conservation, and energy efficiency through the use of eco-friendly materials and technologies. Social sustainability is addressed through local sourcing, cultural heritage preservation, and inclusive community participation in tourism planning. In Kalaburagi, these practices are closely aligned with the Karnataka Tourism Policy and national guidelines, emphasizing the integration of tourism with agriculture, cultural identity, and community well-being. Data for this study were collected through field observations, providing insights into the practical implementation and impact of sustainability-driven hospitality in the region.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable, Rural, Tourism, Culture, Agriculture.

### Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, contributing to employment generation, cultural exchange, and regional development. Within this broad framework, rural tourism has emerged as a vital instrument for promoting sustainable livelihoods, preserving heritage, and diversifying local economies. In India, rural tourism is increasingly recognized as a pathway to inclusive growth, aligning with national priorities such as sustainable development, community empowerment, and environmental conservation.

Hospitality practices form the cornerstone of rural tourism experiences, shaping how visitors interact with destinations and communities. Sustainable hospitality goes beyond traditional service delivery; it integrates environmental responsibility, socio-cultural sensitivity, and economic viability. Practices such as waste management, water conservation, renewable energy adoption, local sourcing, and heritage promotion not only enhance visitor satisfaction but also safeguard natural and cultural resources for future generations.

The Kalaburagi district of Karnataka offers a unique context for examining sustainable hospitality. Known for its agrarian base, rich cultural traditions, and emerging tourism potential, Kalaburagi is gradually positioning itself as a rural tourism hub. However, challenges such as financial constraints, limited government support, and low tourist demand hinder the full realization of sustainability goals. At the same time, opportunities exist in leveraging local employment, cultural immersion, and eco-friendly innovations to strengthen the district's tourism ecosystem.

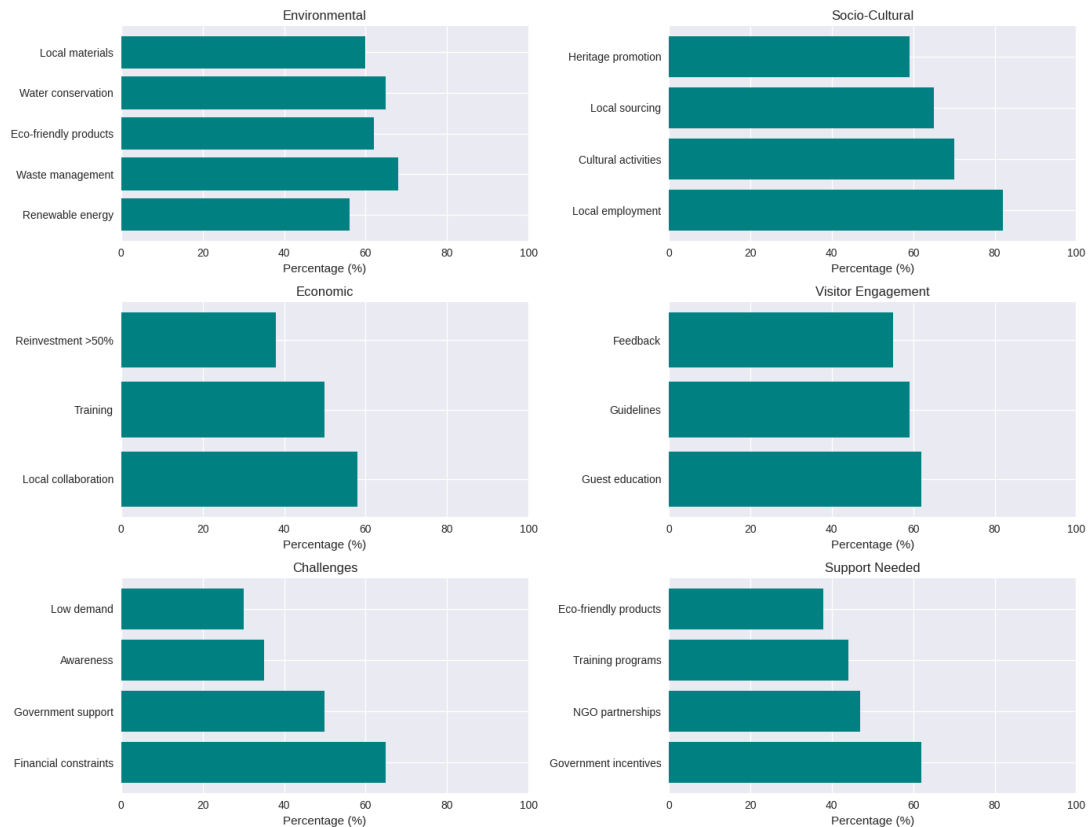
Despite growing interest in sustainable tourism, scholarly literature on rural hospitality practices in Kalaburagi remains limited. Most studies focus on urban tourism or broader state-level initiatives, leaving a gap in understanding how sustainability is implemented at the grassroots level. This article seeks to address that gap by exploring the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions of hospitality in Kalaburagi's rural tourism sector, while also identifying challenges, support needs, and strategies for improvement.

### **Literature review**

Rural tourism has been the subject of extensive research from various perspectives. Ruiz-Real et al. (2020) pointed out that rural tourism and its development have attracted significant attention, prompting an increased number of research studies into the subject. Recent research by Nongbri and Singh (2022) examined sustainable rural tourism and entrepreneurship while López-Sanz et al. (2021) focused on rural tourism and the sustainable development goals. An and Alacron (2020) reviewed sustainable rural tourism, and Ivona (2021) examined the sustainability of rural tourism and promotion of local development. Moreover, Martini et al. (2020) investigated the role of female entrepreneurs in sustainable tourism development in marginal rural mountain areas. Radović et al. (2020) studied financing problems in rural tourism. LópezSanz et al. (2021) delved into rural tourists' behaviour regarding sustainable development goals. Additionally, Rosalina et al. (2021) studied the economic impacts of rural tourism while Demirović et al. (2020) investigated rural residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development. Beyond that, Getz and Carlsen (2000) looked at the characteristics of rural tourism enterprises, and Kastenholz et al. (2018) studied the dimensions of rural tourism experiences. Kantar and Svržnjak (2017) delved into rural tourism development from sociological perspectives, and Podovac (2016) investigated the importance of sustainable rural tourism development in Serbia. Likewise, extensive studies have been conducted on the conceptualization of rural tourism (Lane, 1994), the basic motivations of rural tourists (Park & Yoon, 2009), and the problems encountered in rural tourism diversification (Sharpley, 2002). Adopting sustainable practices has been a topic of interest in various aspects of the literature. It seems the past studies on rural tourism are fragmented. There has been a prevalence of studies focused on the concept of sustainable rural tourism and the understanding of sustainable tourism from the environmental, economic, and social aspects in a holistic manner and from the customers' perspectives (An & Alarcon, 2020) but not from the tour operator's perspective (Hamid & Isa, 2020). However, sustainable tourism, in particular sustainable practices, requires participation by all the stakeholders in the tourism industry (United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organization, 2005). Little is known about the extent of sustainable practices from the rural tourism operators, especially the meaning of and motives for sustainable practices adopted in rural areas of Sabah. Arguably, such information is vital for state tourism agencies and related policy makers in implementing sustainable development in rural sites with sound strategies. Increasing the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations and increasing the number of quality tourism experiences are critical for long-term sustainable growth. In the context of Sabah, numerous rural areas rich in natural and cultural resources have the potential to be developed as rural tourism destinations by the local community. Local communities are taking advantage of tourism opportunities to diversify rural economies and local development and as a way of revitalizing their respective districts. Over the years, rural tourism has become an important and fast-growing sector in Sabah, creating unique rural tourism experiences and generating benefits to the local communities, which are crucial to ensure competitiveness and sustainable growth (Chan, 2020). Sustainable rural tourism is vital to ensure the continuation of the abundant resources and unique experiences at the rural sites. However, it is unknown to what extent the sustainability concept has been applied in the rural context by the rural tourism community and operators. Rural communities are important stakeholders in a tourism destination (Gajdošík et al., 2018) because they co-create the tourism product and can significantly affect the visitors' opinions of the destination. Simply, they are the owners and guardians of their local resources—land, buildings, local products—upon which development is based. Their skills, traditions, knowledge, and energy are the principal resources for rural development; their engagement is vital. These are the people who live in a particular rural area that is the basis for sustainable development. They know best what, how, and why for sustainability practices.

## Analyses of Data

Sustainability Practices Across Hospitality Providers



## Research Methodology

### Primary Data Sources

Primary data refers to information collected directly from original sources, offering firsthand evidence that is highly relevant to the research topic. In this study:

- **Magazine Websites:** Articles, reports, and features published online provide up-to-date insights, industry trends, and expert opinions. These are considered primary because they originate directly from the publishers without prior interpretation.
- **Online Platforms:** Other digital sources such as blogs, official organizational websites, and specialized portals were consulted. These platforms often present raw information, announcements, or direct communications from stakeholders.
- **Significance:** Primary data ensures originality, authenticity, and immediacy. It helps capture the most current perspectives and factual details, reducing the risk of distortion that may occur through secondary interpretation.

### Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data involves information that has already been collected, recorded, or analyzed by others. In this study:

- **Questionnaires:** Pre-existing survey responses were examined to identify patterns in opinions, preferences, or experiences. These responses represent data that has already been gathered and stored, making them secondary in nature.
- **Observation Techniques:** Behavioral observations, such as recorded user interactions or documented audience responses, were analyzed. Since these observations were previously noted rather than freshly conducted, they serve as secondary evidence.
- **Significance:** Secondary data provides context, background, and comparative insights. It allows researchers to validate primary findings, identify trends over time, and strengthen conclusions with broader evidence.

## Findings

- **Environmental Sustainability**
  - Waste Management (68%) & Water Conservation (65%)**
    - These two practices emerge as the most widely adopted, indicating that organizations and communities recognize their immediate impact on resource efficiency and environmental protection.
    - **Waste Management:** Adoption reflects efforts to reduce landfill use, promote recycling, and encourage circular economy models. The high percentage suggests strong awareness of the environmental and economic benefits of minimizing waste.
    - **Water Conservation:** With growing concerns over water scarcity, conservation practices such as rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation, and low-flow fixtures are becoming mainstream. The high adoption rate highlights the urgency of safeguarding this critical resource.
- **Eco-friendly Products (62%) & Renewable Energy (56%)**

These practices show moderate uptake, pointing to a growing but still developing commitment.

  - **Eco-friendly Products:** The use of biodegradable, non-toxic, and sustainably sourced materials reflects consumer demand for greener alternatives. The adoption rate suggests that while awareness is strong, cost and availability may still pose challenges.
  - **Renewable Energy:** Solar, wind, and other renewable sources are increasingly integrated into operations. However, the moderate percentage indicates barriers such as high initial investment, infrastructure limitations, or policy constraints that slow widespread adoption.
- **Use of Local Materials (60%)**
  - This practice demonstrates a **strong commitment to sustainable construction**.
  - By sourcing materials locally, organizations reduce transportation emissions, support regional economies, and ensure cultural relevance in design.
  - The adoption rate reflects a balance between sustainability goals and practical feasibility, showing that many stakeholders value both environmental and social benefits.
- **Socio-Cultural Sustainability**
- **Local Employment (82%)**
  - Highest adoption rate, showing that organizations and projects prioritize hiring from within the community.
  - This practice strengthens economic resilience, reduces unemployment, and fosters a sense of ownership among local residents.
  - High adoption reflects a strong commitment to social sustainability, ensuring that development benefits are shared directly with the community.
  - **Cultural Activities (70%) & Local Sourcing (65%)**
  - Both practices demonstrate well-supported initiatives that enhance cultural and economic integration.

- **Cultural Activities (70%):** Encouraging festivals, traditional performances, and community events helps preserve identity and strengthen social bonds. The strong uptake suggests recognition of culture as a vital component of sustainable development.
- **Local Sourcing (65%):** Prioritizing locally available materials and products reduces environmental impact from transportation, supports regional businesses, and promotes authenticity in construction and consumption. The adoption rate shows a balance between sustainability goals and practical feasibility.
- **Heritage Promotion (59%)**
  - While adoption is notable, it is lower compared to other practices, suggesting room for growth.
  - Heritage promotion involves preserving historical sites, storytelling, and integrating cultural heritage into modern development.
  - The relatively modest percentage indicates that while heritage is valued, it may not yet be fully integrated into sustainability strategies. Strengthening this area could enhance cultural continuity and tourism potential.
- **Economic Sustainability**
  - **Local Collaboration (58%) & Training Initiatives (50%)**
    - These practices show moderate adoption, reflecting a growing but not yet universal commitment to strengthening local capacity.
    - Local Collaboration (58%): This indicates that just over half of providers actively partner with local stakeholders, such as community groups, small businesses, or local governments. Such collaboration fosters trust, enhances project relevance, and ensures that initiatives align with community needs. The moderate level suggests that while collaboration is valued, there may be barriers such as resource constraints, lack of networks, or limited awareness of its long-term benefits.
    - Training Initiatives (50%): Half of providers invest in skill development programs, workshops, or capacity-building activities. This is crucial for empowering local communities, improving employability, and ensuring sustainability of projects. However, the moderate adoption rate highlights that many providers still underutilize training as a tool for long-term impact, possibly due to budget limitations or prioritization of short-term outcomes.
  - **Revenue Reinvestment (38%)**
    - Only 38% of providers reinvest more than half of their revenue locally, which points to limited economic circulation within communities.
    - This low percentage suggests that while providers may generate income from local operations, much of it flows outward rather than being retained to support local businesses, infrastructure, or social programs.
    - Limited reinvestment can weaken the multiplier effect of economic activity, reducing opportunities for community growth and resilience. Strengthening this practice would enhance local prosperity, create stronger supply chains, and build sustainable economic ecosystems.
- **Visitor Engagement**
  - **Guest Education (62%):** A majority of providers emphasize educating visitors about sustainability practices, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and respect for local culture. This proactive approach helps shape responsible tourist behavior and fosters long-term awareness.
  - **Behavioural Guidelines (59%):** Clear rules and codes of conduct are widely implemented to ensure visitors act responsibly. These guidelines often cover areas like wildlife protection, resource use, and cultural sensitivity, reinforcing sustainable tourism values.
  - **Feedback Collection (55%):** While slightly lower in adoption, feedback mechanisms allow tourists to share experiences and suggestions. This participatory approach can strengthen

sustainability by identifying gaps and improving practices. The relatively modest uptake suggests untapped potential for deeper visitor involvement.

- **Challenges**

- **Financial Constraints (65%):** The most significant barrier, highlighting the difficulty of funding sustainable initiatives. High upfront costs for eco-friendly infrastructure, renewable energy, or training programs often deter providers.
- **Limited Government Support (50%):** Half of respondents cite insufficient policy backing, subsidies, or regulatory frameworks. Without strong institutional support, sustainability efforts remain fragmented and under-resourced.
- **Lack of Awareness (35%):** A notable portion of stakeholders and visitors are still unaware of the importance of sustainable practices. This gap hinders adoption and reduces the effectiveness of existing initiatives.
- **Low Tourist Demand (30%):** The relatively low interest in sustainable experiences points to a marketing challenge. Providers must better communicate the value of eco-friendly tourism to attract and retain visitors.

- **Support Needed**

- **Government Incentives (62%):** The most desired form of support, reflecting the need for subsidies, tax breaks, or grants to offset financial barriers. Strong policy backing could accelerate adoption of sustainable practices.
- **NGO Partnerships (47%):** Collaboration with NGOs can provide expertise, funding, and advocacy. These partnerships help bridge gaps between local communities, providers, and global sustainability networks.
- **Training Programs (44%):** Capacity-building initiatives are in demand to equip providers and communities with the skills needed for effective sustainability management. Training ensures long-term impact and empowers local stakeholders.
- **Access to Eco-friendly Products (38%):** Availability of affordable, sustainable materials and products remains a challenge. Improved supply chains and distribution networks could make eco-friendly options more accessible and cost-effective.

## **Recommendations**

### **Environmental Sustainability**

- **Invest in Renewable Energy:** Starting with partial integration—such as solar water heaters or solar-powered lighting—allows organizations to reduce reliance on fossil fuels while managing costs. Gradual adoption builds momentum toward full renewable energy integration.
- **Enhance Waste Management:** Composting bins and partnerships with local recycling initiatives help divert waste from landfills, turning organic waste into useful resources and strengthening community recycling networks.
- **Adopt Eco-friendly Products:** Biodegradable toiletries, refillable dispensers, and natural cleaning agents reduce harmful chemical use and plastic waste, aligning daily operations with eco-conscious values.
- **Implement Water-saving Technologies:** Low-flow fixtures and rainwater harvesting systems conserve water, addressing scarcity issues while lowering utility costs.
- **Utilize Local Materials:** Sourcing wood, stone, and textiles from nearby artisans reduces transportation emissions and supports local economies, while also embedding cultural authenticity into construction and design.

### **Socio-Cultural Sustainability**

- **Hire and Train Locals:** Prioritizing local employment and offering skill-building workshops empowers communities, enhances livelihoods, and ensures cultural continuity.
- **Promote Cultural Immersion:** Activities like cooking classes, folk performances, and village tours enrich visitor experiences while preserving traditions.

- **Source Locally:** Partnering with farmers and craft producers ensures fresh, authentic supplies while strengthening local supply chains.
- **Celebrate Heritage:** Incorporating traditional motifs and storytelling fosters pride in local history and creates meaningful connections between visitors and communities.

#### Economic Sustainability

- **Collaborate with Cooperatives:** Joint ventures with local businesses—such as bundled services or co-hosted events—expand opportunities and distribute economic benefits more equitably.
- **Offer Training Programs:** Hospitality and sustainability workshops build capacity among staff and community members, ensuring long-term resilience.
- **Reinvest Locally:** Allocating profits to community development or environmental projects creates a multiplier effect, sustaining both economic and ecological growth.

#### Visitor Engagement

- **Educate Guests:** Welcome kits and awareness sessions inform visitors about sustainability practices, encouraging responsible participation.
- **Set Behaviour Guidelines:** Clear codes of conduct promote respectful interaction with nature and culture, protecting fragile ecosystems and traditions.
- **Collect Feedback:** Surveys and feedback mechanisms provide valuable insights into guest perceptions, helping refine sustainability strategies and strengthen participatory approaches.

#### Overcoming Challenges

- **Raise Awareness:** Social media campaigns and on-site signage highlight sustainability efforts, increasing visibility and visitor buy-in.
- **Seek Funding:** Applying for green grants or partnering with NGOs provides financial support to overcome cost barriers.
- **Market Sustainability:** Promoting eco-credentials on travel platforms attracts conscious travellers, boosting demand for sustainable experiences.

#### Support Recommendations

- **Government Incentives:** Advocacy for tax breaks or subsidies can reduce financial burdens and accelerate adoption of green technologies.
- **NGO Partnerships:** Collaborations provide training, resources, and outreach, bridging gaps between local communities and global sustainability networks.
- **Eco-product Access:** Bulk-buying networks lower costs of sustainable goods, making eco-friendly products more accessible and affordable for providers.

#### Conclusion

The study of 34 hospitality providers highlights a **positive trajectory toward sustainability**, with homestays and eco-resorts emerging as leaders. Their smaller scale and community-based operations make them more agile in adopting eco-friendly practices.

- **Renewable Energy:** Many providers are integrating solar water heaters, solar lighting, and energy-efficient systems, reducing dependence on fossil fuels.
- **Waste Management:** Recycling, composting, and minimizing single-use plastics are becoming common, reflecting a strong environmental ethic.
- **Local Hiring:** Employment of community members strengthens social ties, enhances livelihoods, and ensures that tourism benefits are shared locally.

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