Published by

British Journal of Contemporary Research

BEXFORD PUBLISHING

Reviving Heritage: Traditional Products as Catalysts for Tourism Growth in Kerala, India

Original Research Article | Volume 1 | Issue 6 | 2026 | Article Number: 051

Accepted: 23 October 2026 | Published: 10 November 2026 | ISSN: 2979-8582 (Online)

Crossref : **https://doi.org/10.67693/BJCR-R47FCR8L**

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Abstract

Tourism in North Kerala stands at a fascinating crossroads, where ancient craft traditions meet the aspirations of a new generation of entrepreneurs. This study examines the role of traditional handicrafts in driving tourism development across the region, with particular attention to the entrepreneurial possibilities that lie within this sector. For many travellers, handmade crafts are not merely decorative objects they are tangible encounters with Kerala's living cultural identity. Artisans, tourists, and local stakeholders who participated in this study were consistent in one view: tourists genuinely prefer authentic, handmade products over mass-produced alternatives. Yet the sector faces real and persistent difficulties. Poor infrastructure, limited access to wider markets, inadequate training opportunities, and the fragmented integration of crafts into formal tourism packages all hold the industry back. The findings confirm a meaningful positive relationship between handicraft activity and artisan incomes, pointing clearly to the need for well-targeted support. Policy priorities that emerge from the study include building stronger market linkages, developing dedicated craft-based tourism circuits, investing in capacity building, and ensuring that institutional support is both responsive and sustained.One concern that the data highlight is a generational shift: despite a growing interest in tourism-driven enterprise, younger people are being deterred by limited career prospects and poor financial stability. Addressing this requires more than goodwill it calls for concrete government incentives, fairer wage structures, and creative marketing approaches that enhance both the perceived and actual value of traditional products. In the longer run, diversifying the craft portfolio, adopting fresh marketing strategies, and ensuring that artisans can earn a decent living from their skills are all essential for sustainability. Ultimately, preserving indigenous crafts as a core thread of Kerala's tourism identity will require committed collaboration among governments, communities, artisans, and the private sector.

Keywords: Heritage Tourism, Traditional Handicrafts, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

North Kerala's tourism landscape is built on an unusual combination of ecological richness, living traditions, and historical depth. When visitors arrive in this region, they do not just encounter landscapes; they encounter a way of life that has been shaped over centuries. Traditional products like Kasavu sarees and hand-thrown pottery are central to this experience, functioning as cultural gateways that connect outsiders to the region's heritage. But these objects, and the people who make them, are navigating a complicated world. Globalisation has expanded markets while also flooding them with cheaper imitations. Consumer preferences have shifted in ways that are sometimes favourable and sometimes threatening to traditional production. And the commodification of culture, the packaging of heritage for tourist consumption, presents its own ethical and practical dilemmas.

The COVID-19 pandemic, for all the damage it inflicted on the global tourism industry, also created unexpected opportunities. With international travel severely curtailed, domestic tourism gained new momentum, and many travellers began seeking more meaningful, locally rooted experiences. Digital platforms and virtual tourism tools made it easier to discover destinations and plan visits, while governments and industry stakeholders found themselves reconsidering the kind of tourism they wanted to encourage. Sustainable practices, once the concern of a minority, began entering mainstream conversations.

India's tourism sector is large, diverse, and economically significant. It generates employment, facilitates cultural exchange, and contributes to livelihoods across the income spectrum. But it also faces ongoing challenges around infrastructure, sustainability, and adapting to a rapidly changing global environment. North Kerala encompassing the districts of Kannur, Kasaragod, and the northern reaches of Wayanad offers a particularly instructive case study. The region is rich in traditional goods: handloom textiles, handicrafts, coir products, and distinctive culinary traditions. The question this study sets out to answer is whether these traditional products can serve as genuine engines of tourism growth and entrepreneurship.

The Role of Traditional Products in Tourism

Traditional products matter to tourism for reasons that go beyond their commercial value. When travellers buy a handwoven textile or a piece of locally crafted metalwork, they are making a connection to the artisan who made it, to the community it comes from, and to a history that the object embodies. This is why such products are far more than souvenirs. As Duan et al. (2023) observe, traditional handicrafts such as textiles and pottery carry deep layers of regional artistic and historical meaning. Rasool and Maqbool (2024) make a related point: tourists who purchase such items often feel a more genuine connection to the destination than those who do not.

The economic dimensions are equally important. Traditional handcrafted goods provide livelihoods for artisans who often have few other options for monetising their skills. The leather craft industry in Magetan, East Java, is a telling example: tourist demand for handcrafted souvenirs has expanded employment and stimulated local economic activity (Sugiarti et al., 2019). In heritage areas more broadly, tourism-driven demand for traditional craftsmanship creates jobs and income for artisans and related stakeholders (Karakul, 2019). Craft villages that allow tourists to watch artisans at work and purchase their products directly generate revenue, sustain craft traditions, and attract ancillary services (Travelers-Choice, 2023).

Traditional products also play a role in cross-cultural understanding that is easy to underestimate. Travellers who bring home culturally significant objects often share the stories behind them the techniques, the traditions, the meaning. In doing so, they spread awareness and appreciation of the cultures that produced those objects (Richards, 1996). These exchanges contribute to the preservation of intangible

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cultural heritage by creating audiences who care about its continuation (Smith, 2009).

In the specific context of heritage tourism, Kannur's handloom fabrics are among Kerala's most recognised traditional products. Known particularly for their Kasavu sarees, cotton or silk garments distinguished by golden borders and intricate motifs, they represent a craft tradition of considerable refinement. According to Chattopadhyay (2015), tourists are often eager to purchase these sarees precisely because they embody local craftsmanship and culture. The weaving process itself has become a tourist attraction: visitors tour weaving villages and cooperatives, watching craftspeople work at traditional looms and learning about techniques passed down across generations. This immersive dimension enriches the tourist experience while providing meaningful income to weavers and their communities (Narayanan & Ramachandran, 2017).

Kasaragod's bell metal crafts offer another compelling example. The district's skilled craftspeople, many from families who have practised the craft for centuries, create objects ranging from temple lamps and ritual vessels to ornamental pieces, all using techniques that have changed little over hundreds of years. Tourists are drawn to these objects both for their aesthetic quality and their cultural resonance (Menon, 2016). Workshops that open their doors to visitors allow people to observe the slow, careful process of crafting by hand, adding an educational dimension to what might otherwise be a simple transaction. Purchasing a bell metal piece becomes a way of supporting a living tradition (Varma & Joseph, 2018).

Kerala's traditional products, taken as a whole, represent a remarkable synthesis of cultural identity and practical craft. From metalwork and spices to woodcarving and textiles, these goods have been shaped over centuries by artisans who learned from their predecessors and added their own contributions. Their appeal to domestic and international tourists alike rests on their authenticity and their deep connection to the places and communities that produced them (George, 2014). The handloom sector alone supports thousands of families, particularly in rural areas, and is a vital part of Kerala's socioeconomic fabric (Narayan, 2012). Products like Kasavu sarees, wooden carvings, and Ayurvedic preparations are not merely commercial goods; they are carriers of stories, skills, and cultural memory (UNESCO, 2013). Many follow sustainable production methods, using locally sourced and eco-friendly materials, which aligns well with the growing market for responsible and culturally engaged tourism. Kerala's ability to sustain these traditions in the face of globalisation is both a cultural achievement and an economic strategy (Chopra, 2014; Nair & Pillai, 2018).

2. Literature Review

Scholars have consistently recognised the importance of traditional products to cultural tourism, particularly in regions with rich and distinctive heritage. Richards (1996) established a foundational argument: that indigenous customs, regional food traditions, and traditional handicrafts offer visitors experiences that are both economically and culturally valuable, reinforcing local sustainability and identity. Heritage tourism, as he describes it, attracts people who are looking for genuine, immersive cultural encounters rather than standardised leisure experiences.

Timothy and Boyd (2003) extended this perspective by demonstrating that the integration of traditional arts and crafts into tourism development not only protects cultural identity but also delivers significant economic benefits. There is an important intergenerational dimension here: when tourism creates demand for traditional products, it gives younger members of craft communities a reason to learn and carry forward the skills their parents and grandparents practised.

Kerala's traditional industries, including coir production, handloom weaving, and Ayurvedic practice, are especially well-suited to a form of tourism that Singh (2012) describes as eco-cultural: an approach that

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uses local cultural and ecological resources responsibly, ensuring that both heritage and environment are sustained rather than depleted. When tourism is managed in this way, it generates economic activity without compromising what makes the destination attractive in the first place. Narayan (2012) adds that tourism demand has already had a demonstrable positive effect on Kerala's handloom and handicraft sectors, breathing new life into art forms that had been in decline and generating employment for craftspeople who might otherwise have had to abandon their trades.

The concept of authenticity is central to understanding what draws culturally motivated tourists to traditional products. MacCannell's (1973) influential concept of "staged authenticity" captures a tension that is still very much alive in heritage tourism: travellers are increasingly in search of experiences that feel real and unmediated, while the tourism industry has a tendency to stage and package precisely those experiences. In North Kerala, products like Theyyam-themed souvenirs or locally harvested spices serve as concrete expressions of cultural authenticity; they represent the destination in ways that generic tourism merchandise cannot.

Marketing strategies are indispensable to making traditional products viable in competitive markets. Chattopadhyay (2015) makes a strong case for branding regional goods as cultural souvenirs, arguing that products like Kasavu sarees and wooden crafts gain market traction when they are positioned as expressions of Kerala's distinctive identity rather than simply as objects to be bought and sold. Heritage-based storytelling, when combined with effective marketing, can expand interest in traditional products among both domestic and international audiences, benefiting artisans and local economies in turn.

North Kerala's festivals and performance traditions, most notably Theyyam, are powerful draws for cultural tourists. These events showcase living art forms and give visitors a chance to engage with a heritage that is still actively practised and contested, not merely displayed in museums (Kurup, 2012). The connection between festival culture and traditional product markets is direct: during such events, traditional crafts and regional specialities find ready buyers, and the visibility of the region's cultural life attracts visitors who might not otherwise have come. The risks of over-commercialisation, however, are real. Cohen (1988) warned that the intense commodification of cultural forms can erode the very authenticity that gives them value. When rituals are performed primarily for tourist consumption, or when craft objects are simplified to suit tourist tastes, something essential can be lost. Maintaining the balance between financial sustainability and cultural integrity remains one of the central challenges for any destination seeking to build tourism around its traditional heritage.

Policy frameworks play an important enabling role in this balance. The Kerala government's Responsible Tourism programme has worked to connect local communities, including artisans, with the tourism supply chain, creating pathways for inclusive economic participation (RT Mission Kerala, 2019). Singh (2012) observes that government support in areas like infrastructure, skills training, and cooperative marketing substantially increases the visibility and market viability of traditional products. Richards (1996) cautions, however, that sustainable tourism development must respect regional customs while engaging with global trends, a balance that is neither automatic nor easily maintained.

3. Methodology and Design

This study focuses on the role of traditional products in developing tourism across North Kerala, with particular attention to the people who produce and sell those products: entrepreneurs, artisans, and workers in tourism-related industries. The research design is both descriptive and empirical, examining the nature and significance of traditional products while also gathering primary data on how those involved in the sector perceive its opportunities and challenges.

The geographic focus was deliberately selected to encompass the key districts of Kannur, Kasaragod, and

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the northern part of Wayanad areas with strong craft traditions and significant tourism activity. A stratified random sampling approach was used to ensure representation across different categories of respondents, including those involved in both production and marketing. The sampling frame was constructed from local business directories, tourism department databases, and associations connected to traditional crafts and products in the region.

Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with separate instruments designed for entrepreneurs and workers to capture the different perspectives each group brings. Secondary data, official reports, government statistics, and published research were used to contextualise and interpret the primary findings. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, with descriptive statistics and t-tests used to identify patterns and test for significant perceptual differences among respondents.

3.1 Traditional Products in North Kerala

North Kerala, historically known as Malabar, occupies a distinctive place in India's tourism landscape. Its combination of natural beauty, clean beaches, quiet backwaters, and the forested slopes of the Western Ghats, with a rich and living cultural heritage, has made it increasingly attractive to both domestic and international visitors. Recent years have seen visitor numbers grow substantially, with over 3.5 million arrivals in the most recent year on record, driven in part by improved infrastructure and targeted promotional efforts. Beach tourism accounts for roughly 40% of total arrivals. Houseboat cruises have seen bookings rise by 25% year-on-year, and adventure tourism activities, trekking, river rafting, and zip-lining have grown by around 30%.

The traditional handmade products of North Kerala are more than tourist souvenirs. They represent a living artisanal heritage, with techniques and designs that have been shaped over generations. Handloom weaving is a particularly central tradition: skilled weavers work with cotton, silk, and jute on traditional wooden looms to produce fabrics of real quality and character. The iconic Kasavu saree, with its gold-bordered designs and motifs drawn from Kerala's natural and mythological heritage, is perhaps the most recognisable of these products, but the tradition encompasses Mundus, Kurtas, and a wide range of other textiles (Rajeev, 2020). Equally significant is the region's tradition of wooden craftsmanship, with artisans from established craft families transforming raw timber into sculptures, furniture, and decorative objects of real skill and beauty. Together, these products embody Kerala's artistic identity and the need to sustain traditional craftsmanship in the face of contemporary pressures (Das, 2021).

3.2 Major Traditional Products of North Kerala

3.2.1 Kasaragod Sarees

Kasaragod sarees are among the most distinctive textiles produced anywhere in India. Woven from premium cotton and silk threads by highly skilled artisans, they are defined by the Kasaragod handloom weave a technique in which intricate patterns are built directly into the fabric during the weaving process, rather than applied afterwards. The motifs, flowers, birds, and geometric forms are drawn from the natural world, giving the sarees an organic elegance that is immediately recognisable. Available in a range of colours from the vivid to the subdued, Kasaragod sarees have long been valued not only for their aesthetic appeal but for their durability, cultural significance, and the direct support they provide to traditional artisan communities.

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Figure 1: Kasaragod Saree weaving (Source: https://www.dsource.in)

3.2.2 Kannur Handlooms

Kannur's handloom tradition is one of the most historically significant in Kerala. Artisans use traditional wooden looms to weave fabrics from cotton, silk, and occasionally jute, producing textiles characterised by a distinctive texture and quality that machine production cannot replicate. The Kasavu saree, white cotton with a gold zari border, is the most celebrated product of this tradition; its motifs are inspired by the region's landscapes and cultural imagery. But the tradition also encompasses the Mundu, the Kurta, and other garments, demonstrating a versatility that allows traditional aesthetics to find expression in contemporary fashion. Weaving societies and heritage handloom villages, including the well-known communities at Kanhirode and Azhikode, continue to produce these textiles today.

The Azhikode Handloom Village deserves particular mention. Its history of weaving stretches back to the sixteenth century, rooted in the story of the Saliya community weavers brought from Tamil Nadu by the Chirakkal kings and settled near the temples of Azhikode. For generations, weaving was not merely an occupation but a defining feature of community life, with families involved in every aspect of production. The mid-twentieth century brought a surge in demand, particularly for the distinctive "Kannur Crape" fabric. Today, the village collaborates with Hantex to supply fabric for school uniforms, and it holds official recognition as a heritage handloom village.







Figure 2: Kannur Handloom Sarees (Source: https://www.filmingindo.com) | Figure 3: (Source: Author's own photographs)

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3.2.3 Payyanur Pavithra Ring

The Pavithra ring from Payyanur is an object whose significance cannot be understood in purely material terms. Worn on the right-hand ring finger, it is a sacred ornament believed to bring prosperity and spiritual well-being to those who wear it. Its defining feature is the Pavithrakettu, a distinctive knot design said to symbolise purity and to represent the three principal nerve channels of the human body: the Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. The ring's origins are bound up with the mythology of Lord Subramanya and the Payyanur Subramanya Swami Temple. Traditionally crafted from Darbha grass, it was later produced in gold following the temple's reconstruction. Ancient texts, including the Puranas, attest to its spiritual significance, and wearing it during religious rituals is believed to purify the wearer and promote both material and spiritual growth. The Chowattavalappil Perunthattan family continues to uphold the tradition of crafting this ring today.



Figure 4: Payyanur Pavithra Ring (Source: Author's own photographs)

3.2.4 Kunhimangalam Heritage Village: Bronze Lamp

The village of Kunhimangalam, near Payyannur in Kannur district, has been a centre of bronze and bell metal craftsmanship for over nine hundred years. Its craftspeople, members of the Moosari community produce objects of remarkable skill and variety: lamps, sculptures, ritual vessels, temple accessories, and decorative pieces, all made by hand using moulds that are used only once. In 2018, bell metal sculpting was formally recognised as a heritage craft by the government, and Kunhimangalam was designated a special heritage village. The craftspeople here draw on a rich repertoire of traditional forms, including idols made from panchaloha, an alloy combining gold, silver, copper, zinc, and iron as well as items specifically created for Theyyam performances and temple rituals. With a catalogue of around 400 distinct products, including more than 30 varieties of lamp, the village represents an extraordinary concentration of living craft knowledge. The Kunhimangalam Bell Metal Heritage (Pvt Ltd) cluster, established in 2018, works to preserve this tradition and attract younger practitioners.

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Figure 5: Kunhimangalam Bronze Lamps (Source: Author's own photographs)

3.2.5 Thalangara Thoppi

The Thalangara cap Thalangara Thoppi is a handmade prayer cap produced in the village of Thalangara in Kerala. Made from pure cotton with firm sides and carefully worked decorative designs, it is worn by Muslim men during prayer and carries deep religious significance. Production is slow and meticulous: a single cap takes between fifteen and twenty days to complete, which is part of why these caps are not widely available through general retail channels. Tourists visiting the Malik Dinar Mosque often purchase Thalangara caps as cultural souvenirs, recognising in them a combination of religious devotion and artisanal skill that is genuinely rare.



Figure 6: Thalangara Thoppi (Source: https://www.keralatourism.org)

4. Data Analysis

Understanding who the respondents are is an essential starting point for interpreting any research on tourism and traditional products. Socioeconomic background shapes how people engage with these products as makers, as sellers, and as buyers, and it determines the constraints they face and the opportunities available to them. In tourism research particularly, socioeconomic factors influence consumption patterns, preferences, and access to markets in ways that are often decisive (Gurung & Sharma, 2019). Examining these factors allows researchers to identify disparities and to develop recommendations that address the real conditions of the people involved.

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Table 1: Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Variable	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
1	Gender	Male: 57.3%	Female: 42.7%	—	—
2	Age	20–30: 9%	30–40: 5.5%	40–50: 33.6%	50+: 60%
3	Education	High School: 73.6%	Plus Two/Diploma: 17.3%	Degree: 6.4%	Post-Graduation : 2.7%
4	Income	< ₹1 Lakh: 22.7%	₹1L–3L: 67.3%	₹3L–5L: 9.1%	> ₹5 Lakh: 0.9%

The respondent profile points to some clear patterns. Men make up 57% of the sample. The largest age group by far is those aged 50 and above, who account for 60% of respondents (66 out of 110) a finding that speaks to the generational dimension of craft participation. Educational attainment is modest: 73.6% completed secondary education, and around 90% of respondents fall below an annual income of ₹3 lakhs. These are people working with significant economic constraints, and that context matters when interpreting their views on government support, market access, and the viability of traditional crafts as livelihoods.

Table 2: Traditional Products – Opportunities and Potential in North Kerala

Sl. No.	Variable	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Total (%)
1	I know that tourists are prospective buyers of local and indigenous products.	—	6.4	4.5	61.8	27.3	100
2	Market potential for local and indigenous products is increasing.	—	33.6	16.4	39.1	10.9	100
3	I receive help from authorities (DTPC, tourism boards, etc.) to market my product	0.9	8.2	4.5	58.2	28.2	100

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	during peak seasons and festivals.						
4	The government and relevant authorities have formulated and implemented policies to improve marketing in this industry.	0.9	10.9	18.2	46.4	23.6	100

The responses on market potential and institutional support are illuminating. An overwhelming 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that tourists represent a promising market for local and indigenous products. This is a confident reading of tourist demand, grounded in direct experience. Responses were more divided on the question of whether market potential is actually growing: only about half agreed that it is, suggesting that awareness of tourist interest does not automatically translate into optimism about expanding markets. On the institutional side, the majority of respondents reported receiving some level of support from bodies like the DTPC and tourism boards, particularly during festival seasons, and 70% acknowledged that government efforts to promote the industry through policy are at least partially evident.

Hypothesis 1

H_0: There is no significant difference in respondents' perceptions regarding the potential of traditional products and the level of support from government authorities.

Table 3: Perceptions Regarding Potential and Government Support

Sl.	Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
1	Potential to become a tourism attraction	110	4.10	.754	15.309	.000
2	Gradual increase in export potential	110	3.27	1.048	2.728	.007
3	Support from authorities/government during festive seasons	110	4.05	.861	12.737	.000
4	Active support from government in planning and executing programmes	110	3.81	.953	8.904	.000

The statistical results confirm what the percentage responses suggest. Respondents strongly agreed (M = 4.10) that traditional products have the potential to become genuine tourist attractions in North Kerala. They were more moderately positive (M = 3.27) about the prospect of growing export demand, acknowledging that proper international marketing could expand this potential significantly, with real

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implications for employment and income. On the question of government support, respondents agreed (M = 4.05) that sector survival depends on it, particularly during festival seasons, and that there is a need for more consistent support throughout the year and across markets, including foreign ones. Participation in government-coordinated skills and marketing training programmes was also acknowledged (M = 3.81), though with some variation. Since all p-values fall below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected across all variables.

Table 4: Traditional Products – Entrepreneurial Intentions

Sl. No.	Variable	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Total (%)
1	People with leadership capability can flourish in this sector.	—	0.9	3.6	64.5	30.9	100
2	Risk tolerance is a major factor for manufacturing and marketing traditional products.	—	—	0.9	34.6	64.5	100
3	I am prepared to face challenging situations in this sector.	0.9	17.3	2.7	52.7	26.4	100
4	I am willing to work in a competitive environment.	—	12.7	4.5	63.6	19.1	100
5	I am ready to update my products and skills regularly.	—	—	10.0	22.7	67.3	100

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The responses on entrepreneurial intent are striking in their consistency. An overwhelming 94.5% of respondents agreed that leadership ability is essential for success in the traditional product industry. Even more significantly, 99% agreed or strongly agreed that risk tolerance is a necessary quality a recognition that this is not a sector for the risk-averse. Around 79% indicated they were ready to face challenging conditions, and 82.7% were willing to work in competitive environments. Perhaps most revealing is the near-universal acknowledgement (90% agreeing or strongly agreeing) that survival requires ongoing self-improvement and product innovation. This is a sector whose participants understand to be demanding and dynamic.

Hypothesis 2

H_0: There is no significant perceptual difference among respondents regarding the entrepreneurial traits required for success in the tourism sector in North Kerala.

Table 5: Entrepreneurial Traits for Succeeding

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Leadership and communication	110	4.25	.566	23.262	.000
Risk appetite	110	4.64	.502	34.197	.000
Willingness to take on challenging roles	110	3.86	1.027	8.820	.000
Willingness to work in a competitive environment	110	3.89	.860	10.860	.000
Innovation and timely updating	110	4.67	.471	37.219	.000

The statistical analysis of entrepreneurial traits reinforces the picture drawn by the percentage data. Leadership and communication skills are rated as highly important (M = 4.25): artisans and producers who can manage their supply chains and communicate the value of their products to buyers are better positioned to navigate varied markets. Risk appetite scores even higher (M = 4.64), reflecting an understanding that meaningful investment of time and resources in traditional production requires a genuine tolerance for uncertainty. Willingness to take on challenging roles (M = 3.86) and to operate in competitive environments (M = 3.89) are somewhat lower but still clearly in the “agree” range. The highest mean of all is for innovation and timely updating (M = 4.67), suggesting that respondents see continuous adaptation as the most fundamental requirement for sustained success. All p-values fall below the 0.05 threshold, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis.

5. Discussion and Implications

Several themes emerge from this data that deserve sustained attention from policymakers, researchers, and industry stakeholders.

The age profile of respondents, predominantly over fifty, is perhaps the most striking finding of the study, and not in a reassuring way. Traditional craft knowledge in North Kerala is concentrated among older practitioners, and there are real questions about what happens when this generation retires. The barriers to entry for younger people are clear: limited career prospects, poor financial stability, and a sector in which fair compensation is not reliably available. No amount of appreciation for cultural heritage will bring

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young people into traditional crafts if the economic case is not there. Addressing this requires a combination of financial incentives, improved pay structures, and honest communication about the market conditions that make traditional production viable. On the cost side, respondents consistently noted that raw material and equipment prices are rising, leading to higher retail prices that make competing with non-local manufacturers increasingly difficult. This competitive pressure is real and is eroding market share for some artisans. Yet most continue to use high-quality traditional materials because they understand that quality is ultimately their most defensible advantage. The challenge is ensuring that this commitment to quality is rewarded with compensation that reflects it.

Marketing emerges from the data as a lever with significant untapped potential. Effective promotion particularly promotion that tells the story behind the products, connects buyers emotionally to the craft and its makers, and communicates what makes traditionally produced goods genuinely different from mass-produced alternatives can increase both demand and the price that the market is willing to bear. Respondents demonstrated awareness of intellectual property protections, trademarks, and market conditions, but this knowledge has not always translated into effective marketing practice. Bridging that gap requires practical support: training in digital marketing, assistance with branding, and help accessing platforms and channels that reach culturally motivated buyers.

Technology adoption is another area where the picture is mixed. Respondents expressed largely neutral views on the use of updated equipment in production, suggesting neither strong resistance nor strong enthusiasm. This neutrality may reflect genuine uncertainty about whether technological adaptation strengthens or weakens the authenticity argument that underlies the value of traditional products. This is not a simple question, and different products and different markets will call for different answers. Training programmes appear to be making a difference in skills development, and this positive experience suggests that well-targeted capacity building is worth expanding. Respondents who had participated in government-coordinated training programmes reported that these had improved their ability to make and sell traditional products. Scaling up these programmes, improving their quality, and ensuring that they reach the artisans who most need them should be a policy priority.

The growing export potential of traditional products is an area that respondents acknowledged with some optimism, though the mean scores suggest that this remains a partial and uncertain opportunity rather than an established reality. Realising this potential will require targeted international marketing, assistance with export logistics, and quality certification that builds trust among buyers in foreign markets.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the relationship between traditional products and tourism development in North Kerala, and the findings make a strong case for taking that relationship seriously. The handloom textiles, metal crafts, sacred jewellery, prayer caps, and other traditional goods of this region are not marginal curiosities; they are central to what makes North Kerala a distinctive and meaningful travel destination. They provide livelihoods for artisans and their families, they offer tourists a genuine and enriching encounter with living culture, and they embody a depth of knowledge and skill that has been accumulated across generations.

Preserving this heritage is not merely a cultural imperative; it is an economic one. Traditional products support rural incomes, sustain informal employment, and provide a basis for tourism experiences that cannot be easily replicated elsewhere. But sustaining them requires active and well-designed intervention. Artisans need fairer compensation. Young people need to see a viable future in traditional crafts. Infrastructure needs to be improved. Market access needs to be broadened. And the integration of traditional products into formal tourism packages needs to become more systematic and ambitious.

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The policy recommendations that emerge from this research are interconnected and mutually reinforcing: strengthen market linkages, develop craft-based tourism circuits, invest in capacity building, provide consistent institutional support, and create financial incentives that make traditional production a sustainable livelihood option. None of these interventions will work in isolation. Realising the full potential of North Kerala's traditional products as catalysts for tourism growth will require genuine collaboration between government, local communities, artisans, tourism operators, and the private sector built around a shared commitment to cultural sustainability and inclusive economic development.

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