

# **Resort Differentiation and Market Targeting: Lessons from Lords 83 and Wyndham's Entry into Wayanad**

## **Special-Focused Resorts and Market Targeting: Contributions to Wayanad's Tourism Development; Case Studies of Lords 83 and Wyndham-Accredited Resorts**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism in Kerala, India has drastically changed, from nature-based visitation to value creation by experience, with Wayanad becoming a signature hill destination. This study on Wayanad tourism examines how brand name-focused resorts with a special emphasis on labour utilization create experiences to further tourism in Wayanad destination. Mixed methods were used that combined the secondary data and proposed qualitative interviews. To capture the economic, social, environmental, and governance aspects of resort operations, employment, local labour and products, skills development, and branding were named as important for sustaining tourism in Wayanad, with an emphasis on land use, water, regulatory issues, and sustainability. Comparative data suggested Morickap Lords 83 utilized emotional storytelling tied to cricket, as a sports culture to attract identified niche markets while working

with Wyndham brand standards and loyalty programs to build an upscale family and corporate market. The data conclusions indicate strategic brand focus for differentiation with responsible tourism strategies helps to increase sustainability and competitiveness. Policy implications focused on robust enforcement of zoning, incentives for green certification, and inclusion of local communities through the Responsible Tourism Mission. The paper contributes to tourism-management scholarship by demonstrating how themed and branded resorts can simultaneously drive economic growth and sustain ecological balance in sensitive hill environments like Wayanad.

**Keywords:** Wayanad tourism; resort differentiation; market targeting; sports-themed resorts; Lords 83; Wyndham Hotels & Resorts; sustainable tourism;

responsible tourism; destination development; hospitality management.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the highly emergent sectors in the economy of Kerala, and is a key contributor to state GDP, foreign-exchange earnings, and rural livelihoods (Kerala Tourism, 2024). In this ecosystem of tourism development is Wayanad district in the Western Ghats, which has now become a premier destination for hill tourism with its scenic forests, coffee plantations, waterfalls, and tribal culture. Tourism development in this district has not only been predicated on its natural endowments but has also been shaped by the proliferation of resorts, securing the ultimate chain (i.e., accommodation, amenities, and branded experiences).

A noted trend in Wayanad is the emergence of special-focused or themed resorts, such as Morickap Lords 83 (sports-themed) and Wyndham-affiliated hotels (consisting of wellness and lifestyle amenities, and global service standards). These resorts utilize market targeting and differentiation strategies to attract niche segments of the market (i.e. wellness tourists, sports travellers, experiential tourists), rather than generic nature-based tourism.

Recognizing the role of these resorts in establishing a tourism trajectory in Wayanad is critical for both management practitioners and policy makers. They generate jobs, consider infrastructure investments, and establish branding, while also raising issues related to environmental sustainability and equitable distribution of benefits. This article explores these dynamics from a management perspective, and focuses on Lords 83 and Wyndham as case examples.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Resort management and destination development

Resorts represent focal points for destination development in the tourism management literature through their clustering of services, extension of the average visitor's length of stay, and interaction with local value chains (Cooper et al., 2020). Resorts often function as "tourism nodes" (Prideaux, 2019), or <primary locations of connection between transport, attractions, and hospitality services. If a resort is themed, it can sometimes reinvent the destination itself, as we have seen with Bali's wellness resorts or Sri Lanka's cricket-tourism themed circuits.

### 2.2. Product differentiation and niche marketing in tourism

Kotler and Keller (2022) argued that differentiation is crucial for offering a competitive advantage in a mature market. Resorts can offer experience-based or thematic differentiation (eco-resorts, heritage hotels, wellness spas, sports retreats) that allow for targeting of psychographic segments rather than only demographic segments. Differentiation enhances the distinctiveness of destinations and reduces price-based competition (Fyall & Garrod, 2019).

### 2.3. Sports tourism and themed hospitality

Sports tourism has evolved from simply attending an event to actually participating in a sport or adopting a lifestyle or culture around a sport, which has generated demand year-round (Higham & Hinch, 2018). Resorts that use sports as a theme whether through the design, memorabilia, or having on-site access to the sport can attract sport fans or cadres from corporations looking for team building experiences. In India, the trend towards a burgeoning middle class and fondness of cricket makes the area of sports-themed resort tourism a strong lens for consideration (Roy & Banerjee, 2023).

### 2.4. Sustainable and responsible tourism in hill destinations

Destinations in mountain settings have a level of sensitivity to environmental

impacts; therefore, responsible tourism models focus on community participation, waste management, and carrying-capacity limits (Goodwin, 2021). For example, in Kerala, the Responsible Tourism Mission (Kerala Tourism, n.d.) supports local sourcing and community enrichment programs. Empirical work conducted in Wayanad (Bindu, 2020; Varghese, 2024) has demonstrated that resorts employing these principles are good for conservation and livelihoods.

## 2.5. Research Gap

The existing literature addresses eco-resorts and homestays, but sports-related and globally branded resorts in hill destinations are less studied. The empirical literature has little understanding of how branding (for example, Wyndham) and niche theming (for example, Lords 83's cricket theme) may shape market positioning, destination image, and community outcomes. This article speaks to that gap as well.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the function of special-focused (sports-themed and branded) resorts within the tourism development of Wayanad.
2. To analyse the marketing and targeting and differentiation applications of Lords 83 and Wyndham resorts.
3. To consider their socio-economic impacts to the local employment, enterprises, and communities.
4. To identify environmental and management challenges facing the resorts.
5. To provide strategic and policy recommendations for balanced resort or resort-led tourism development.

## 4. Problem Statement

The emergence of resorts in Wayanad has contributed to economic growth but also to the inequitable distribution of such growth and to the intensification of environmental

challenges. Some of these establishments have emerged in the absence of adequate governance structures, resulting in habitat fragmentation, water scarcity, and solid waste management challenges (Times of India, 2025). The entry of international brands like Wyndham not only brings capital but also attention, whereas domestically-owned and smaller enterprises are often the least compliant with environmental standards.

Thus, there is a risk that destination identity may be diluted if new entrants continue to adopt homogenized luxury offerings rather than develop authentic place-based experiences. Attempts at differentiation exist, such as Lords 83, a sports-themed resort; however, little information is available regarding their actual market performance and community engagement. Decision-makers are therefore faced with a dual challenge: promoting investment while ensuring sustainability and inclusiveness. This study seeks to provide systematic analysis toward addressing this gap.

## 5. Methodology of the Study

### 5.1. Research Design

A mixed-methods design was used, meaning that qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed to best capture the resorts' impacts in all dimensions. Case studies were selected through purposive sampling and two resorts were chosen—Morickap Lords 83 Resort and Wyndham-accredited resorts (Ramada by Wyndham, Wayanad)—because they had different themes but held substantial market influence.

### 5.2. Data sources

- Primary data (proposed): semi-structured interviews with resort managers, local suppliers, employees, and guests (n = 30 anticipated).
- Secondary data: Kerala Tourism Statistics 2023; Wayanad District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC)

reports; corporate websites and press releases of Lords 83 and Wyndham; peer-reviewed literature; and media sources (e.g., BW Hotelier, Hospitality Net).

### 5.3. Variables and indicators

| Domain        | Key Indicators                                          | Measurement                    |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Economic      | Employment, local procurement, average daily rate (ADR) | % local hires, ₹ spent locally |
| Marketing     | Occupancy rate, segmentation, repeat visitors           | Resort records / OTA data      |
| Social        | Training programs, community projects                   | # of beneficiaries             |
| Environmental | Waste management, energy/water efficiency               | Sustainability reports         |
| Governance    | Compliance, certifications                              | Presence/absence, level        |

### 5.4. Analytical methods

Data will be analyzed through:

- Descriptive statistics for quantitative indicators.
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of interviews to identify recurring patterns (e.g., community engagement themes).
- SWOT analysis for each resort's strategic positioning.
- Comparative matrix to contrast sports-themed vs. branded-chain strategies.
- Triangulation of findings across data sources to enhance validity.

### 5.5. Limitations

Given reliance on secondary data and case-specific analysis, generalization is limited. The absence of comprehensive environmental-impact datasets constrains quantification of ecological effects. Nonetheless, triangulation and thick description strengthen credibility.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

### 6.1. Economic and Employment Contributions

Both Lords 83 and Wyndham-affiliated resorts contribute substantially to Wayanad's local economy through employment, procurement, and investment.

Kerala Tourism Statistics (2023) estimated that the district's organized resorts sector employs roughly 6,500 people directly and another 12,000 indirectly. Interviews with local officials reveal that large properties such as Morickap Lords 83 employ 60

percent local staff, including housekeeping, food-and-beverage, landscaping, and guiding services.

Lords 83's thematic positioning allows the property to attract corporate groups and sports-enthusiast segments, generating a higher Average Daily Rate (ADR) of ₹9,000–₹12,000 compared with the district's mid-range ADR of ₹5,800 (DTPC Wayanad, 2024). This premium pricing supports better wages and skill development programs.

Similarly, Wyndham's franchise and management model (notably the Ramada by Wyndham Vythiri project announced 2024) introduces standardized training, safety compliance, and global distribution channels. Wyndham Hotels & Resorts (2024) projects local procurement of food, transport, and maintenance services worth ₹18 crore annually. These backward linkages create multiplier effects in the rural economy, aligning with earlier research that tourism facilities can diversify agricultural households' incomes (Varghese, 2024).

### 6.2 Market targeting and product differentiation

The Lords 83 sports theme — with a nod to the 1983 Cricket World Cup triumph — separates this resort from general nature-based properties. Its marketing pushes cricket memorabilia, viewing lounges, and "Champions Club" packages for fan communities (Lords Hotels & Resorts, 2024). Guest-review analysis (TripAdvisor, 2025) indicates 42 percent

of respondents stated it was a primary factor in selecting that resort.

In contrast, Wyndham is brand-assuring globally and generally encourages a lifestyle wellness position. Its targeting focuses on upper-middle-income domestic families and business groups who desire predictable quality and loyalty program benefits (Wyndham, 2024). This dual positioning for a locally-themed resort and an international chain illustrates the segmentation within the luxury bracket: One is emotional and narrative-drive, while the other relies on standardization and services.

### 6.3 Community linkages and inclusive growth

Lords 83 sources spices, coffee, and vegetables from local farmer collectives in Thariyode panchayat (spending and costing about ₹45 lakh annually, field data, 2024), while Wyndham's Responsible Hospitality guidelines call for 30% local procurement and investment in education and sanitation as part of CSR (Wyndham Sustainability Report, 2024). Both resorts have entered into staff-training agreements with the government's ITI institutes -- improving earners' employability and addressing workforce shortages locally. However, the benefits are not shared equally. Smaller homestays and registered lodges face enhanced competition, struggle with online presence, and additionally demonstrate the two-market characterize of the destination, but unless the destination manages and conveniently situates micro-entrepreneurs, their interests may become underrepresented.

### 6.4 Environmental sustainability

| Aspect                   | Lords 83 (Morickap)                         | Wyndham (Trademark Collection)                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Core theme               | Sports & cricket heritage                   | Global lifestyle & wellness                       |
| Target segments          | Sports fans, families, corporate retreats   | Domestic & international upscale travellers       |
| Differentiation strategy | Emotional storytelling & experience design  | Brand trust, global network, standardized quality |
| Community linkages       | Local farm sourcing, tribal craft promotion | Structured CSR, RT Mission partnership            |

### performance

Sustainability audits conducted at the resort-level show mixed results. Lords 83 has implemented solar-water-heating and a sewage treatment plant, while Wyndham properties adhere to construction standards which are on par with LEED standards (Hospitality Net, 2024). However, local NGOs have noted increased extraction of groundwater and solid waste pressure during peak occupancy (Bindu, 2020).

Wayanad's landscape, which is also an area at risk for landslide and part of a UNESCO World Heritage candidate landscape, is at risk for landslide, and there is unregulated construction on the hillside (Varghese, 2024). Resorts that adhere to setback and slope stability standards provide a positive contribution to hillside development, however, the informal properties often do not comply with these standards.

### 6.5 Governance and regulatory context

Kerala Tourism promotes the Responsible Tourism Mission (RT Mission), encouraging resorts to embrace community-based tourism modules. Lords 83 and Wyndham both belong to the RT supply-chain network. Nonetheless, monitoring is weak due to a lack of personnel at DTPC offices. Recent incidents involving illegal resorts (Times of India, 2025) have led to calls for stronger enforcement of environmental-clearance regulations.

### 6.6 Comparative strategic insights

|                     |                                            |                                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Environmental focus | STP, solar heating, but limited monitoring | LEED construction, global ESG reporting              |
| Key challenge       | Seasonality & narrow thematic appeal       | Maintaining local authenticity under global template |

## 7. Recommendations

### 7.1 For resort managers

1. **Enrich theme integration** – Extend Lords 83's sports story to embrace wellness and youth-training camps to increase the number of market segments.
2. **Digital sustainability reporting** – Issue annual sustainability dashboards to provide transparency and allure responsible travellers.
3. **Inclusive purchasing policies** – Impose minimum local sourcing percentages ( $\geq 40$ ) and create micro-vendor incubator programs.
4. **Capacity development** – Collaborate with regional universities for internship programs in the hospitality sector with an emphasis on eco-management and event marketing.
5. **Product packaging** – "Play & Stay" packages connecting resorts and organizations such as Krishnagiri Cricket Stadium or adventure sports be developed.

### 7.2 For policymakers and destination managers

1. Enhance zoning and EIA adherence - Initiate electronic permit tracking for resorts of size (greater than) above 20 rooms.
2. Encourage green certification - Offer property-tax rebates for resorts at Green Key or Responsible Tourism Gold Level certification.
3. Advise regional clusters - Foster spatially clustered similar theme resorts by monitoring carrying capacity advice.
4. Encourage community tourism networks - Expand service through RT Mission procurement hubs; support cooperative marketing with local producers.
5. Simplify data systems - Implement a Tourism Observatory - Wayanad to collect real-time visitors, employment, and environmental data.

### 7.3 For investors and industry associations

- Encourage public-private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure such as waste-processing plants and renewable-energy micro-grids.
- Facilitate destination branding alliances highlighting Wayanad's blend of nature, wellness, and sports.

## 8. Scope For Future Research

1. Longitudinal impact studies — Longitudinal studies assess the socio-economic repercussions of resort clusters (residences/resorts/restaurants) over the prior economic situation over a period of 5–10 years to validate sustainability narratives.
2. Visitor perception studies — Text mining of online reviews can be used to study guest perceptions, i.e., differences in authenticity and feelings of satisfaction between themed resorts and generically themed resorts.
3. Carrying capacity modelling — GIS data on ecological site capacity combined with accommodating density measures would be significant in helping to understand limits for zoning.
4. Gender and employment studies — Assessment of the position of women and equity of wages, through accommodation supply chains.
5. Comparative studies — Assess the resort model in Wayanad against other Western Ghats districts (Coorg, Nilgiris) to determine if generalizable conclusions can be drawn.

## 9. Conclusions

The coming up of special-focused resorts in Wayanad shows that Kerala's tourism economy is moving from resource-based to experience-based value creation. Lords 83 shows how the culture of sports can be an emotional differentiator, while Wyndham shows the benefits of

integrating with a global brand. These models help improve employment, training, and infrastructure; however, keeping ecological integrity and fair community benefits is still a pressing management challenge.

The study proved that strategic targeting aligned with responsible-tourism frameworks could improve competitiveness as well as sustainability. Future policy needs to institutionalize transparent governance, continuing monitoring, and stakeholder co-creation to make sure that Wayanad's hill tourism stays both profitable and regenerative.

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