

A Study on Cultural and Heritage Tourism in Kerala, India

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ABSTRACT

Kerala, the southernmost state of the country was formed in Nov 1- 1956 by States Reorganization act by combining Travancore, Cochin and Malabar ie: the Malayalam speaking regions. It is believed that the state got the name from the numerous coconut trees across the state because, Kera means Coconut tree and Alam means land. Though it is a small state in the country the Culture and Heritage is really rich and can match to any of its largest counterparts. Tourism has shown great acceleration in terms of popularity and participation globally, to learn and experience cultural and heritage significance of a destination always stay on top selection criterion while planning a tour. This could be utilized responsibly in Kerala since we have the entire adequate factor to cater the needs and expectations of tourist's explorers.

Keywords: Tourism in Kerala, Attractions, Responsible Tourism, Heritage, Culture, Campaigns

1. INTRODUCTION

The culture of India refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities present in the country. our various aspects from languages, religions, dance, to music, and architecture, etc has a wide variance in each state within the country. The same is applicable in the case of Kerala, the beautiful state of South India with very unique landscape and rich cultural and heritage significances popularly known as "God's own Country" is one of the most sought after tourist destination of India. The culture and heritage of the state is a blend of Dravidian and Indian and also been influenced with the neighboring states. The term Cultural and Heritage tourism is the division of tourism in which the point of attraction of a particular destination becomes the culture and heritage of the place itself. It is one of the oldest forms of tourism which may find the roots from the Grand Tour era of 16th century. This form of tourism helps the destination in various ways ie: imaging building, the socio – economic factors and above all helps in the preservation and conservation of cultural and heritage remaining of each place.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are the following.

- To study the present Tourism scenario of Kerala
- To emphasise the significance of Cultural and Heritage tourism in Kerala
- To identify the status of our Cultural and Heritage of Kerala and its conservation methods

- To study the empowerment of local community towards Cultural and Heritage tourism sector
- To explore the potential of Cultural and Heritage tourism in Kerala

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is primarily conceptual in nature and attends to understand the Cultural and Heritage tourism importance and potential along with conservation measures to save our historical assets from premature death. Primary and secondary data been used and the main sources include the visits to the sites, personal interviews, government and private data and analysis of government policy documents.

HERITAGE AND CULTURE OF KERALA

Kerala always remained as the cultural and heritage region and the formation of the Kerala state in the year 1956 Nov1, made it politically united. Kerala is gifted with one of the richest culture and heritage of our nation. The blend of Aryan and Dravidian roots makes it a unique one hence a pan Indian one. There were various factors influenced and enhanced the state to excel in the respective area and among them a few are various religions, art forms, literature, folklore, cuisines the versatile landscape etc. The pre – historic culture of Kerala has deep relation with Tamil culture and the proofs were found from old Tamil literature – Sangam, written 2000 years ago. The architectural tradition of the state can be visible from the ancient temples and palaces across Kerala and built on “Thachushastra”, an ancient science based on 5 basic elements on the universe which offers natural benefits to architectural splendor. The heritage of Kerala has a significant space in the Indian history, which provides the national integrity as the Kerala heritage.

TOURISM IN KERALA

Kerala is meant to be one of the most popular tourism destinations of India among domestic as well as international tourists. The Arabian Sea, sprawling tea plantations of Munnar, the rich biodiversity of Idukki, the uniqueness of Periyar Lake, the beautiful backwaters, the Western Ghats and the delicious cuisines along with cultural and heritage factors plays crucial role in the existence of states’ tourism. The aggressive marketing strategy by Kerala Tourism Development Corporation during the 1980s and the Super brand tag line given by Kerala Tourism, Kerala – The gods own country hit the right cord since that the rest was history. The state tourism has set an agenda to promote ecologically sustained tourism in which connects the socio-cultural and environmental values along with the monetary benefits thus it works as the mechanism for the sake of all tourism stakeholders.

TOURISM STATISTICS 2016

- Foreign Tourist arrival -10,38,419ie: an increase of 6.23% over the previous year’s figure of 9,77,479
- Domestic Tourist arrival - 1,31,72,535ie: an increase of 5.67 % over the previous year’s figure 1,24,65,571
- Foreign exchange earnings - Rs.7749.51Crores ie: an increase of 11.51 % over the previous year

- Total Revenue (including direct & indirect) from Tourism Rs.29658.56 Crores, ie: an increase of 11.12% over the last year's figure.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Kerala has emerged as the best destination in terms of Responsible Tourism initiatives in the vast tourism sector of the country. The effective implementation of some of the well-known measures has helped the state to bag various Global awards regularly on international platforms. The natural resources of skilled manpower, supportive entrepreneurial community, strong local-self-governments, civil society organizations, multitude of micro enterprises, streams of professionals and academicians, responsible media and responsive tourism industry, in abundance plays the role to the state an ideal for sustainable tourism initiatives. The first four destinations where the responsible tourism pilot studies been taken are Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Vythiri. In 2012, the initiative was extended to three more destinations – Kumbalangi, Bekal and Ambalavayal.

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS ON RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

- UNWTO Ulysses Award - Innovation in Public Policy and Governance Award for Kumarakom Responsible Tourism Project, 2013
- PATA Gold Award for Kumarakom Responsible Tourism Project, 2014
- UNWTO Ulysses Award - Corporate Social Responsibility, Kumarakom Responsible Tourism, 2014
- WTM London – The World's best Responsible Tourism Project- Kumarakom

HERITAGE AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN KERALA

Kerala attracts the major chunk of tourists with the rich culture and heritage back ground which is an experiential factor for the tourists to the state.

Currently the cultural and heritage tourism relies on the following factors,

- Community – As our nation is known for the unity in diversity the same is very much visible in Kerala. The harmonious existence of the majority of Hindu religion followers along with Muslim, Christian and Jews is the backbone of the community.
- Art forms - Kerala proudly performs various art forms starting from year old Kathakali to Mohiniyattam, Koodiyattom, Mudiattom, Panchavadyam, Chendamelam and the most ancient form of martial arts called Kalaripayattu etc are few of them.
- Cuisine – Kerala cuisine is very much connected to its cultural and historical roots. The uniqueness relies on the multitudes of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes with coconut and spices as inevitable ingredients of its recipes.
- Festivals and Events –Kerala is land of festivals and events; among them the major is Onam, the harvest festival of Kerala. Temple festivals like Thrissur Pooram, various snake boat and other boat races are significant attractions.

- Ayurveda – The most ancient form of treatment which comes from 5000 years old tradition called Ayurveda is not only the major attraction of Kerala but also to the tourism of India. Every year thousands of tourists come to Kerala to avail the Ayurveda treatment regardless of the geography, domestic and international are equally attracted to it.
- Historical and Heritage sites – Tourists come to experience various sites of historical and heritage significances. Padmanabha Swami Temple, Kappad beach, Edakkal caves, Bekal fort, Marayur dolmens, Jewish synagogue various palaces etc are few of the major attractions among the long list.

4. FINDINGS

From the above study, the following are the summary of findings:

- Tourism in Kerala plays a crucial role in current market trend
- Tourism has caused various positive and negative impacts on the cultural and heritage sector in the state
- Community livelihood can be provided with a better life style with cultural and heritage tourism initiatives
- Sustainable tourism practices have to be followed due to the over exploitation and the need of the era
- Tourism stake holders' role to be more effective for the betterment of cultural and heritage tourism

5. SUGGESTIONS

Kerala tourism is an inevitable part of India tourism market and the USP of the state's tourism relies on the vast and rich culture along with the years old heritage. The potential of the above tourism sector is still unexplored up to some extent in certain areas. The government is trying really hard to break the traditional tourism circuit of Kerala, which is majorly connecting Cochin to eastern districts and the southern districts of the state and to add unexplored destinations of Malabar or the northern regions. This has to be well implemented and executed since this may have the real potential to help the state in skyrocketing the tourism opportunities in various levels. The preservation and conservation of our heritage sites to be well monitored since the respective government body has so much of funds and responsibilities associated with it, also we should understand the value of such assets. The awareness campaigns about the cultural and heritage tourism and the value of them in general to be spread among the tourists as well as the stakeholders too.

6. CONCLUSION

Time less beauty of Kerala is the precious gift from the almighty and once the major part of it belonged to Lord Sripadmanabha, as per historians and thus Kerala was termed as Gods Own Country. Kerala is so unique by holding different geographical and cultural values in such a small area of land. Tourism in Kerala grows gradually each year but the truth is the rate which it shows now is nowhere to its actual potential and that has to be really rectified and adequate measures to be taken in terms of that.

7. REFERENCES

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