

MAJOR TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF TOURISM IN KODAGU DISTRICT

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Abstract: Tourism in India has been emerging as one of the largest service sectors industries. Therefore it is rightly pointed out that 'India is a country with many worlds'. Karnataka is no exception from it. Karnataka is also a home to several forts, architectural marvels and is blessed with a rich cultural heritage. Other diverse visitor attractions include pilgrim sites, coastal landscape and wildlife and national parks. State offers a variety of tourism products that cater to the demand from different visitor segments, such as, eco-tourism, wellness tourism and adventure tourism. Over the years, Karnataka has emerged as one of the most sought after tourism destinations in the country and also created a space for itself in the international tourism circuit. As of 2013, the State was ranked as the fourth preferred destination among domestic tourists and ranked third with regard to attracting investments in the tourism sector (Karnataka Tourism Policy 2015-2020 Department of Tourism Government of Karnataka). In this backdrop, it is rightly stated that Karnataka is "ONE STATE, MANY WORLDS" (Tourism Policy 2009-2014). In this context, tourism is used as an instrument for overall development of state and thus the state government has declared "Tourism as an Industry" since 1988 (Economic Survey of Karnataka 2010-11). Karnataka has been witnessing a tremendous influx of international and domestic tourists that has added to foreign exchange earnings. The tourist flow into the state has continuously been increasing steadily from 8.41 crore in 2011 to 11.82 crore in 2014, which indicates comprehensive increase of 40.54 percent (Economic Survey of Karnataka 2015-16).

Keywords: Homestays, Influx, Lush, Comparative and niche.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important development strategy not only for generating employment opportunities but also a source of income in the country. Since 1991, with the introduction of structural reforms in Indian economy has hugely contributed to increase the percentage of lower and upper middle class households in the country. On the other hand the growth of infrastructures across the country has brought down the cost of transportation and communication. Subsequently, increase in awareness regarding the importance of culture, language, life style of others, history besides spending time outside their normal residence during week end etc are further added fuel for the growth of travel and tourism industry. In this way, the substantial growth of middle income households and increase of their disposable income led to rapid growth of the travel and tourism industry. In addition, increased awareness of tourism significance among middle income groups has generated the additional demand for variety of tourism supporting activities such as hotels and lodges, motels, guest houses, travel agencies, guides, bed and breakfast, homestays so on and so forth. In this background, this study has undertaken to examine the major tourists' destinations and challenges of tourism with reference to Kodagu district.

2. TOURISM IN KODAGU

Kodagu has carved itself a niche in the tourism map of India, for displaying to the world its natural beauty and the unique hospitality of the Kodavas. Together with the traditional religious tourist attractions, Kodagu attracts urban nature lovers

with a unique combination of eco-tourism and homestays. The uniqueness of tourism in Kodagu is that, tourists are attracted to the district, both for its natural beauty and its cultural events. With its postcard-perfect settings, pleasant climates and green environment, Kodagu destination for spending holidays. No surprise that the Kodagu is the 'Scotland of India' is seeing an influx of visitors. While the average number of tourists float around 25 lakh a year, this year may spring a surprise (Times of India Nov 29, 2014). While 249 homestays are registered, a recent drive by the administration to persuade more homestay owners to legalize their business has upped the number to 550. In addition, there are more than 1,500 homestays unregistered doing rapid business in the district (Kodagu Homestay Association, Times of India Nov 29, 2014).

The district is a part of Western Ghats and is covered with green forest, high lands and cultivated plantation valleys and orange groves. It is known for its scenic beauty and attracts tourists in large numbers. River Cauvery originates from Kodagu at Talekavery. The district is inhabited by people of unique tribes like Eravaru, Kudiyaru, Kurubas and Tribals along with Coorgis (Kodavas). About 33 percent of the total geographical area of the district is covered by forest with an area of 134597 hectares and is endowed with rich forest resources. Major forest produces are Rosewood, Teakwood, Honne, Nandi, Wild jack and Bamboo. Minor forest products include Soap nut, Honey, Wax, Tree mass etc (Kodagu District Industrial Profile). There are numerous resorts, spas, budget and luxury hotels. Scenic attractions Cultural Attractions Kaveri Nisarga Dhama, Omkareshwara temple, Dubare Elephant Camp, Talakavery and Bhagamandala, Raja Seat Igguthappa temple, Abbi Falls Madikeri Fort, Brahmagiri Hills, Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, Kodagu Dasara, Mallalli Falls, Kaveri Sankramana Nagarahole National Park, Huttari festival, Honnammana Kere, Nalknadu Palace, Irruppu falls and Chelwara falls (District Human Development Report Kodagu Draft Report). In this background, this study was undertaken with the following objectives.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was undertaken with the objective of examine the major tourist destinations in the form of religious centres, historical places, adventure and natural sights in Kodagu district and to highlight the problems associated with the tourism industry of Kodagu.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was based on secondary data. Secondary data related to this study was collected from the Tourism Policies of Government of India and the State Government, Policy drafts, Kodagu Human Development Report, Kodagu District at a Glance, Office of the Assistant Director of Tourism and Homestays Association. Articles published in journals, news paper reports and internet sources etc were also collected to examine the topic. Registered homestays are legally approved by the Department of Tourism and unregistered homestays are neither approved nor recognised by the government authorities and however, the study was based on secondary data. The problems of tourism are associated with all kinds of homestays and also related to the tourist destination of the district. The present study was confined to Kodagu district.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, results of the study are presented under following sub headings. There are as follows;

5.1. Major Tourist Destinations

Tourism has been an effective instrument for generating employment, earning revenue and foreign exchange, enhancing environment, preserving culture and tradition. Kodagu district has huge comparative advantage than any other districts in the state which can use as an instrument for the overall development of the district. The major tourists attracting destinations are as follows;

5.1.1. Abbey Falls: The first British chaplain of Coorg named this place Jessy Falls after his daughter. After the departure of the British, the land came under the Government of India, renamed as the Abbey falls. It is located around eight kilometres away from the Madikeri city and is one of the most popular tourist attractions in and around Kodagu district. The water flow coming down from the cliff from a height of 70 feet provides a spectacular scene to watch. Nestled within the lush greenery which is typical to the sceneries of Western Ghats, the waterfalls attract hundreds and thousands of people throughout the year - especially nature lovers and photographers. The waterfall is located between private coffee plantations with stocky coffee bushes and spice estates with trees entwined with pepper vines. There is an over-bridge that hangs opposite of the falls, from where the most picturesque scene of white foams gushing down the ridge can be seen,

captured and remembered. The flow of the falls leaves a significant amount of water spray on those who stand on the bridge for some time.

5.1.2. Madikeri Fort: During 17th century, King Muddu Raja was built the fort by using mud and later the structure was rebuilt by Tipu Sultan in granite. Linga Rajendra Wodeyar II reconstructed it in brick and mortar between 1812 AD and 1814 AD. Life size stone elephants are seen at the entrance. A panoramic view of the entire city is provided by the fort.

5.1.3. Omkareshwara Temple: Depicting both Islamic and Gothic architecture, King Lingarajendra was built Omkareshwara temple in 1820 AD as a dedication to Lord Shiva which is located in the heart of Madikeri city. A water tank in this temple houses many fresh water fish and adds to the beauty of this temple.

5.1.4. Raja Seat: During king's rule, it was the favourite place of leisure for the kings of Kodagu. Raja's Seat is one of the top destinations to visit the Madikeri. Nowhere else see the flowers bloom beautifully in Raja's Seat; a sprawling seasonal garden perched on a hillock that offers picturesque view of the sunset. Visit the Raja's Seat early morning and find the valley covered with mist, resembling a bride dressed in white gown. There is also a pillared structure amid the exquisite garden, presenting sublime architectural beauty. It is also a nice place for recreational activities and mostly visited by families and honeymoon couples. Unwind and rejuvenate at the lap of nature at Raja's Seat.

5.1.5. Bhagamandala: It is situated in the scenic foothills of Talacauvery, at a distance of 40 kms from Madikeri. Talacauvery is the source and origin of the river Kaveri, which is often referred to as 'Dakshina Ganga' which means 'Ganga of the South' and also one of the seven sacred rivers of the country. A bath in the holy waters of the Bhagamandala is not only extremely sacred it is also a spiritually uplifting and cleansing experience. Immersing in the pure and thoroughly enchanting waters of the holy Thriveni Sangama has an infinitely positive effect on the mind, body and soul.

5.1.6. Talacauvery: It is a source of the river Kaveri, located on the Brahmagiri hill near Bhagamandala in Kodagu district of Karnataka. It is located at 1,276 metres above the sea level. Kodavas have erected a tank which is now considered as its origin. It is believed that the river originates as a spring feeding a tank or a Kundike and then flows underground to re-emerge as Kaveri some distance away. The tank is marked by a temple and bathing in it on special occasions is considered holy.

On the eve of Cauvery Sankramana, thousands of pilgrims and tourists flock by the stream to witness the rise of the spring's fountainhead, when the river water surges up at a predetermined moment. Apart from the birthplace of river Kaveri, the town of Talacauvery is also famous for a temple dedicated to Goddess Kaveramma (Mother Kaveri). The gorgeous temple is surrounded by breathtaking and lush green hills. The undulating hills and lush green meadows are very picturesque. One can climb the 407 steps to the top of the hill, towards the clouds and breathe in the pure and serene air of the natural surroundings. The most interesting thing about the hills is that even when one is standing on the uppermost step, they can still hear the temple bells ringing down below in the temple.

5.1.7. Nalakunad: It was the hunting lodge of Kodagu king dating back to 18th century. It is situated at the bottom of Kodagu's highest peak Tadiyendamol.

5.1.7. Tadiandamol Peak: It is one of the highest mountain peaks in Kodagu district, at an elevation of 1748 mtrs. Majority of the tourists interested in trekking are drawn to this place however the view from the top, unparalleled. While being the second highest peak in all of Karnataka, Tadiandamol trek is also a very good option for nature lovers who desire scenic surroundings and are beginners in the trekking scene.

5.1.8. Nagarhole National Park: With its diversity of flora and fauna, the Nagarhole National Park is one of the best known wildlife reserves in India. It houses not just multiple species of plants and shrubbery but also mammals, reptiles, crawlers and rare birds. Tiger, Indian bison and Asian elephants are found in large numbers inside the park. Other species include leopards, wild dogs, jackals, grey mongoose, sloth bears, striped hyena, spotted deer (Chital), sambhar, antelopes, wild boars, Indian porcupine. More than 270 species of birds in the park including the critically endangered Oriental White Backed Vulture, the Greater Spotted Eagle and the Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon. Further, Reptiles including the crocodiles, vine snakes, wolf snakes, rat snakes, bamboo bat viper, Russell's Viper and Indian Rock Python are also found in the national park.

5.1.9. White River rafting in Barapole River: Barapole River is very famous for white river rafting destination in Kodagu. The white frothy river with speedy waters and rapids, flowing through beautiful landscapes, makes for an ideal river rafting experience. In the backdrop of Western Ghats and bordering the Deccan Plateau, Kodagu is a popular destination among travellers. White water rafting is organized in Upper Barapole are called Kithu-Kakkatu River which is one of the strong catchment areas for the monsoons and thus providing a some of the most challenging stretch of rapids.

5.1.10. Iruppu Falls: It is a picturesque waterfalls cascading along the Brahmagiri Mountain Range. Iruppu falls is one of the most beautiful tourist attractions in the Kodagu district of Karnataka state. These are also known as the Lakshmana Tirtha Falls, a name derived from the tributary of Cauvery River. Nestled amidst the evergreen woods of the Western Ghats, Kodagu boasts of many misty waterfalls. Among them Iruppu is the most popular, not just for its mesmerizing beauty and greenery because of its religious importance. People come here to enjoy the blissful vicinity of nature, the grandeur of the falls and for seeking spiritual peace in the tranquillity of the place.

5.1.11: Honnamana Lake: It is the biggest lake located in Somwarpet taluk and also one of the spiritual as well as historical significance places in the district. Tank is located at the adjacent to Goddess Honnamana temple and hence it is called Honnamana Lake. The lake is surrounded by hills, coffee plantations and manmade caves.

5.1.12: Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary: Pushpagiri is one of the 21 wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka and home to many rare and endangered species of birds. The Kumara Parvat peak lies here. This National Park is also a proposed World Heritage site.

5.1.13: Brahmagiri Trek: It is located on the border between Wayanad District of Kerala state on the south and Kodagu District in Karnataka on the north side. The peak of the hill is well-forested and is rich in wildlife. The primary attractions around this trek are the Iruppu Falls, the Thirunnelai Temple which is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and Pakshipathalam. The route traverses lush forests, green grasslands and countless small streams and rivers.

5.1.13: Dubare Elephant Camp: Once it was a training site for elephants of the famous Dasara procession in Mysore. Dubare Elephant camp offers a unique adventure to visitors by allowing them the experience of living in coexistence of wild elephants with the trained elephants on-site. It is now run by private players and an ideal destination to learn about the various aspects of the history, ecology and biology of elephants, as well as a large number of Asiatic elephants stroll through peacefully as they enjoy their natural habitat. Naturalists and mahouts trained in the art of handling these majestic creatures are ever-present throughout the camp, offering various insights to passers-by regarding these gentle giants.

5.1.14: Nisargadhama: It is a charming island formed by River Cauvery, and is one of the main tourist places in Kodagu district. Nisargadham is an island and also a popular picnic spot which is nestled amid lush bamboo groves, thick foliage and beautiful sandalwood and teak trees. The island can be reached via a hanging rope bridge; it is perhaps the most exhilarating part of the journey. Once can come across rabbits, peacocks and deer on this island. There is also an orchidarium and children's playground in this place.

5.2. Challenges of Tourism in Kodagu District

Tourism is widely recognised as service industry besides which mainly depends upon variety of factors such as income, availability of infrastructure including roads, favourable climate, lodges and guest houses, resorts, homestays, security and safety etc. Indiscriminate promotion of homestays and resorts even in eco sensitive areas has become threat to wildlife in the district. The man and animal conflict is increasing across the Kodagu district. More importantly, elephants and other wild animals including tiger, cheetahs are attacking on people and their domestic animals. In many cases, the wild animals killed several people and more than hundred of domestic animals during every year. Therefore, it is important to encourage tourism only in safe zones without disturbing the wildlife habitats in the district.

Tourism destinations accessible to efficient infrastructure are capable to attract the large number of tourists. In Kodagu district, there are no good roads to connect the tourism places. Kodagu is a hilly region located in Western Ghats where the construction of railways is very difficult task moreover it disturbs the eco system. Development of road transportation is best solution for reaching every corner of the tourist destinations located in the Kodagu.

It is fact that the large number of homestays promoters are the residents of urban areas whereas only few rural households have benefited from the homestays scheme. Therefore, the homestays scheme has led to income disparity as well as regional imbalance in the district. In this juncture, the government should adopt the liberal policy regulations for the

promotion of homestays in rural areas and regulate the homestays in urban areas which encourages the rural households' participation in tourism activities.

Tourism is a significant source of income and employment especially for people residing nearby the tourist destinations. Recently the Government of Karnataka has been indiscriminately issuing licenses to the resorts in Kodagu district. Rural and urban households engaged in homestays have been facing the tough competition from these resorts and thus the local households are being denied the source of income as well as job opportunities especially for unskilled labour and women.

6. CONCLUSION

Tourism has been increasingly popular all over the world and it has become an important source of economic growth of many countries. Karnataka is no exception. Kodagu is a small district in Karnataka which has more comparative advantage in tourism assets than any other district in state. In recent days, Kodagu is popularly known as one district with many worlds because it is the home of variety of tourism products such as adventure tourism, nature tourism, eco tourism, religious tourism, agri tourism, homestays tourism, historical places etc. In this context, there are vast opportunities for the development as well as explore the tourism destinations for generating the revenue to the government, employment opportunities to people and income for rural and urban households. Availability of infrastructure such good roads, information centres, tourist guides, homestays etc influence on the growth and development of tourism which in turn significantly contribute to overall development of the district. However, the absence of efficient means of road transportation is a great impediment for promotion of Tourism. Therefore, Government of Karnataka with the Cooperation of Tourism Department take constructive measures for construction of all season roads, while issuing of licenses to rural households, adopt the liberal regulations encourages the local people participation in tourism development.

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