

ECO-TOURISM IN COURTALAM

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has a significant responsibility and role to play, not only in global scenario, but also in the Indian scenario. Tourism is one of the largest industries with fastest expansion in its range and dimension. Tourism provides a vast spectrum of employment to both the semi-skilled and the unskilled. Tourism is an important sector of the economy and contributes significantly in the country's Gross Domestic Product as well as Foreign Exchange Earnings. Tourism also makes a tremendous contribution to the improvement of social and political understanding. Tourism is thus an important means of promoting cultural exchange and international co-operation. The contribution of tourism to economic well-being depends on the quality and the revenues of the tourism offer. Courtalam is one of the famous tourist centers of Tamil Nadu, which is located in Tirunelveli District, at a mean elevation of 160 metres on the Western Ghats. Eco-Tourism is a new concept in tourism. It is a purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. Eco-tourism can contribute directly to the conservation of sensitive areas and habitat. Revenue from park entrance fees and similar sources can be allocated specifically to pay for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas. Negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change. Eco-tourism has the potential to increase public appreciation of the environment and to spread awareness of environmental problems, when it brings people into closer contact with nature and the environment. Eco-tourism can have a cultural impact on local communities. Eco-tourists are often partially motivated by the chance to experience local culture, which can have a positive and affirming effect on that culture. SaralVizha is a ceremony which involves bathing in the Courtalam Waterfalls.

Key Words

Provide Employment, Cultural Development, Economic Development, Cultural Heritage, Tourism in Tamilnadu, Tourism in Courtalam, Infrastructure, Eco-Tourism, Environmental Awareness, Cultural Impact

Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's most rapidly growing industries and it is denoting the voluntary movement of people from their normal place of residence to a distant destination in search of rest, relaxation, and for a new experience and subsequent return. Tourism helps every country to earn a large amount of income particularly through foreign exchange without exporting any tangible product. Tourism is attracting people to a destination, transporting them there, accommodating, feeding and entreating them upon arrival and returning them to their homes. Tourism is one of the largest industries with fastest expansion in its range and dimension. It involves no erection of factories and earns large sum of foreign exchange without in anyway exporting any tangible product. It is an industry with great employment potential.

Provide Employment

Tourism provides a vast spectrum of employment to both these semi-skilled and the unskilled. Studies in developing countries have shown that investment in tourism generates more employment than an equivalent investment in highly mechanized industries. The ancillary industries have a direct bearing on tourism are handicrafts and souvenir industry, leisure and entertainment services and the personnel who deal with tourists across the counter in customs, immigration, air ports, air lines, railway stations, emporia, banks, medical, police, communication, advertising, sports agencies and many other organizations. Tourism is an important sector of the economy and contributes significantly in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE). With its backward and forward linkages with other sectors of the economy, like transport, construction, handicrafts, manufacturing, horticulture, agriculture, etc., tourism has the potential to not only be the economy driver, but also become an effective tool for poverty alleviation and ensuring growth with equity. Rapid market growth and competition are the buzz words in the context of global tourism. The development of E-Commerce has led to many changes in the tourism industry. It threw open a new set of challenges and opportunities to marketing of destinations around the globe. Products and services are offered directly on-line to customers, which help the customers reduce service costs and attract customers. Building a website to market destinations which once was an option has become a necessity now in the tourism industry. According to the World Tourism Organization the key to internet success lies in the swift identification of customer needs and the establishment of direct contact with consumers, offering them comprehensive, personalized and upto-date information. The rapid development of internet provides unprecedented and affordable opportunities for global representation and marketing of tourism.

Cultural Development

Tourism has a significant responsibility and role to play, not only in global scenario, but also in the Indian scenario. Besides providing employment to a large number of people, tourism can be the instrument of regional policy and at achieving an equitable balance between major industrial areas and the rest of the country. It enables the wealth earned in one part of the country to be transferred to another. Tourism also makes a tremendous contribution to the improvement of social and political understanding. Travel in different countries fosters a better rapport between people of various stocks. Personal international contacts have always been an important way of spreading ideas about other culture. Tourism is thus an important means of promoting cultural exchange and international co-operation. Another important feature of the tourism industry, which is of particular significance to India, is its contribution to national integration and preservation of natural as well as cultural environments and enrichment of the social and cultural lives of people. Over 382 million domestic tourists visiting different parts of the country every year return with a better understanding of the people living in different regions of the country. They have a better appreciation of the cultural diversity of India. Tourism also encourages preservation of monuments and heritage properties and helps the survival of arts forms, crafts and culture. Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses growing number of new destinations. These dynamics have turned tourism into a key driver for socioeconomic progress. Today, the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce, and represents at the same time one of the main income sources for many developing countries. This growth goes hand in hand with increasing diversification and competition among destinations. This global spread of tourism in industrialized and developed states has produced economic and employment benefits in many related sectors – from construction to agriculture or telecommunications.

Economic Development

The contribution of tourism to economic well-being depends on the quality and the revenues of the tourism offer. Tourism assists destinations in their sustainable positioning in ever more complex national and international markets. As the UN agency dedicated to tourism, UNWTO points out that particularly developing countries stand to benefit from sustainable tourism and acts to help make this a reality. India is one of the best and beautiful countries and one of the most popular tourism destinations in South Asia. It is renowned for its lavish and heartfelt

treatment of all visitors, no matter which corner of the world they come from. Tourism in India has armed the country with immense potential of development, recognition, and livelihood. After independence, the focus of Indian government was solely on industrial and economic development. However, in the twentieth century, India became a popular name on the world map with the recognition of amazing locations to explore. The second half of twentieth saw the country scaling to great heights in terms of tourism activities. International tourists have well recognized the potential of Indian tourism industry. The rich culture and tradition of India contributed in making the country a prominent name among global places of visit. As an Asian subcontinent displaying much variation in landscape, religion and traditions, India has become a lively place of visit. The Indian slogan '*Athithidevobhava*' means that guests are like God. Indians have been highly hospitable and this trend is still present in modern India. It appeals tourists from all over the world and provides them unique tourism experience to cherish for lifetime.

Cultural Heritage

The country has right tourism potential and copious tourist places and attractions to captivate all kinds of tourists throughout the entire globe. Tourism in India has countless options which can be relished by tourists on their vacation in the country. Cultural, heritage, adventure, wildlife, pilgrimage, beach, backwater, nature, medical, and monsoon tourism are popular tourism options available in India which enthralls tourists from all over the world. It is said that a country is well recognized by its culture and tradition. And, the country has rich culture, ancient civilization, glorious history and fascinating tradition which appeal tourists and yes never fail to steal their heart and grab their attention. There are several cultural heritage monuments in the country which are the major attraction of inspiring tourism in India. Yoga, Ayurveda and natural health resorts also attract tourists with the promise of rejuvenating their souls and bodies. The Indian handicrafts, particularly, jewelry, carpets, leather goods, ivory and brass hold international appeal. Surveys indicate that nearly forty per cent of the tourist expenditure on shopping is spent on such items.

Tourism in Tamilnadu

Tamil Nadu is located along the southeastern coast of India, all the way down to the Indian peninsula's southernmost point where the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean meet. It is a paradise for tourists. Tamil Nadu being the 'Gateway to the South' has a marvelous mosaic of tourist attractions like archaeological marvels, sculptural beauties, historical monuments, and exquisite temples with their captivating architecture, beach resorts, hill stations and the alluring wild life. Tamil Nadu is referred as the "Land of Temples" because there are more than 30,000 temples in this state. It caters to different expectation of the visitors thanks to

the wide range of tourist centers. The State of Tamil Nadu has the potential to become a preferred tourism destination world-wide. With an area of 130,058 sq. km and a population of over 55 million, Tamil Nadu is the eleventh largest populated and the third most industrialized state in India. As regard tourist infrastructure, impressive developments have taken place in the last 25 years. Hotels providing accommodation to the various income groups including star hotels have come up in the several tourist centers. The convenient air links, the well oiled Railway net work crossing the state and burgeoning road transport system (both public and private) ensure that every place of interest is easily accessible. People who visit Tamilnadu go back with an everlasting memory of the land and people. Tamil Nadu is a land of magnificent temples that remain intact exposing the marvel and glory of the Dravidian culture, art, architecture and spiritual values.

Tourism in Courtalam

Courtalam is one of the famous tourist centers of Tamil Nadu, which is located in Tirunelveli District, at a mean elevation of 160 metres on the Western Ghats. Many seasonal and a few perennial rivers such as the Chittar River, the Manimuthar River, the Pachaiyar River and the Tamiraparani River originate in this region. The numerous waterfalls and cascades along with the ubiquitous health resorts in the area have earned it the title 'the Spa of South India. Main Falls (Peraruvi), Small Falls (Chitraruvi), Shenbagadevi Falls, Honey Falls (Thenaruvi), Five Falls (Aindharuvi), Tiger Falls (PuliAruvi.), Old Falls (PazhayaCourtallaruvi), New Falls (PuthuAruvi), Fruit Garden Falls (PazhathottaAruvi) are the major tourist attractions in Courtalam. The Waterfalls are fed by the monsoon, colloquially referred to as "Courtalam Season". During the commencement of southwest monsoon in Kerala terrain the first showers will be in and around Courtalam within a radius of 3-4 kilometres approximately. It continues to shower during the season, which will be from June- September every year. The waters of Courtalam have lot of herbal values, which reduce hypertension and gives relaxation to mind. Those suffering from rheumatic joints, chronic headache, and nerve disorder get cured by a lengthy stay at Courtalam. Courtalam is recognized as summer resort for middle class people. Showers will profuse during the southwest and northeast monsoons. Courtalam, although a very small town, is packed with tourists during weekends and season-time.

Infrastructure

The basic public services needed for the successful operation of tourism enterprises and for optimizing the comfort of the visitors. It includes such services as roads, electricity, water, security, Sanitation and health services, telephone and postal communication, railways and airports. Tourism is an instrument of economic development and employment generation. It has been well recognized the world over. It is a large service industry

globally in terms of gross revenue as well as foreign exchange earnings. Tourism has the potential to grow at a high rate and ensure consequential development of the infrastructure of the destinations. It has the capacity to capitalize on the country's success in the services sector and provides sustainable models of growth. Tourism stimulates agriculture, horticulture, poultry, handicrafts, transport, construction and the like through its backward and forward linkages and cross sectoral synergies. Expenditure on tourism induces a chain of transactions requiring supply of goods and services from the related sectors. The consumption demand, emanating from tourist expenditure also induces more employment and generates a multiplier effect on the economy. India's performance in tourism sector has been quite impressive. Tourism is the movement of the tourists from one place to another place. It is the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the place where they normally live and work includes the activities they indulge in at the destination as well as all facilities and services specially created to meet their needs. Tourism does not only mean traveling to a particular destination but also includes all activities undertaken during the stay. It includes day visits and excursions.

Eco-Tourism

Eco-Tourism is a new concept in tourism. It is a purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. Courtalam, of all the tourist places in Tamilnadu offers the maximum potential for the promotion of Eco-Tourism. In an around Courtalam many places have been identified for development as Eco-Tourism destinations giving emphasis to conservation, ecological sustainability, environmental education and local community benefits. Keeping this objective in mind the Tamilnadu Tourism has setup a separate Eco-Tourism wing to give policy support for the development of the Eco-Tourism destinations in the State. There are many places can be developed as Eco-Tourism destinations giving emphasis to conservation and environmental education. The products such as trekking, bird watching trails and the like can be developed and operationalised through the constitution of Eco-Development Committees.

Positive Impacts

Eco-tourism can contribute directly to the conservation of sensitive areas and habitat. Revenue from park entrance fees and similar sources can be allocated specifically to pay for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas. It generates money from natural environments by encouraging tourists to visit and during their stay; they pay for items like entrance fees, concessions and licenses. The Indian government through

the Tourism Department also collects money in more far reaching and indirect ways that are not linked to specific parks or conservation areas. User fees, taxes on sales or rental of recreation equipment and license fees for activities such as rafting and fishing can provide governments with the funds needed to manage natural resources. Such funds can be used for overall conservation programs and activities like park rangers' salaries and park maintenance.

Negative Impact

Eco-tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors of tourism industry growing annually by 10-15% worldwide. Negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change. Eco-tourism has been broadly defined as tourism that is based on the natural environment and that seeks to minimize impacts on that environment. But the increasing number of eco-tourists also provides a threat to the quality and sustainability of natural ecosystems. Although eco-tourism is intended for small groups, even a modest increase in population, puts extra pressure on the local environment and necessitates the development of additional infrastructure and amenities.

Environmental Awareness

Eco-tourism has the potential to increase public appreciation of the environment and to spread awareness of environmental problems, when it brings people into closer contact with nature and the environment. This confrontation heightens awareness of the value of nature among the community and leads to environmentally conscious behavior and activities to preserve the environment. Eco-tourism can significantly contribute to environmental protection, conservation and restoration of biological diversity and sustainable use of natural resources. Their attractiveness, pristine sites and natural areas are identified as valuable and the need to keep the attraction alive, can lead to creation of national parks.

Cultural Impact

Eco-tourism can have a cultural impact on local communities. Eco-tourists are often partially motivated by the chance to experience local culture, which can have a positive and affirming effect on that culture. Involving local people in decision-making not only tends to make them more positive about tourism, but also empowers them as a community.

SaralVizha

SaralVizha is a ceremony which involves bathing in the Courtalam Waterfalls. The bathing at the magnificent waterfalls is believed to welcome prosperity and well being. The event is magnified into a ritual which is believed to bring about a pleasant change in the life and body of the devotees. The waterfalls endowed with medicinal properties helps to tone the body and wash away the toxics collected in the body. This helps in the smooth functioning of the human body and hence helps the mind and brings about a feeling of peace and tranquility. When a person puts his head under the huge amount of water hurling down the mountain, he feel scared, but it is nothing but bliss. With the advent of the season the masseurs are in great demand. One has to wait one's turn to get a massage, much like devotees waiting in Tirupathi for offering their hair. The feeling good, feeling happy state of mind after an 'oil bath' cannot be described in words - it has to be experienced. The tourists and the local people congregate in this place to avail the salubrious Saral breeze. The salubrious season is adorned with Saral (drizzling rain). During this season, the Department of Tourism and the District Administration in coordination with all other Departments conduct a week long 'SaralThiruvizha'. Competitions on various categories are being conducted as part of the week-long 'SaaralThiruvizhaa'. The cultural events organized in the festival attract thousands of tourists. Tourists who visits Courtalam to get drenched in the Waterfall, almost always drop in for a quick relaxing oil massage before their baths. Every waterfall in Courtalam has its own masseur and they all use til oil, renowned for its natural relaxing properties. They also use oils and balms like 'Ponnangani' and 'Santhanaaditailum'. The art is learnt from senior masseurs and passed on from one generation to the next. "These massages cool the body, reduce burning in the eyes, improve blood circulation in the body and are good for the face.

Conclusion

Tourism occurs in a wide variety of environments, and tourism and the environment are inseparable. The environment whether it is natural or manmade is the most fundamental ingredient of the tourist product. The continuing success of the tourism industry depends in large measure on a clean, safe and ecologically stable environment. The environment is inevitably changed when tourism occurs. A successful tourism industry measured in terms of the number of visitor brings its own problems in terms of its impact on the host area. The growth of tourism has brought with it a wide variety of impacts, ranging from those which are economic or socio-cultural in character to those which are ecological in nature.

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