

A STUDY ON RURAL TOURISM IN MADURAI DISTRICT

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Introduction

The development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of people are live in 7 million villages. From east to west and north to south entire country is cemented with villages and hamlets in India having rural tourism potentials. Wealth of craft, performing art and vivid lifestyle are attracting the tourists in India. In rural culture as a tourist attraction capitalizes the agri tourism as the prime product. Rural tourism often promoted as a mechanism to support regional agricultural communities. In the developed countries has resulted in a new style of tourism visiting village settings to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle. The central Government of India has given priority to rural tourism in the tenth five year plan from 2002-2007 to provide sustainable livelihood for the rural Indian villages.

Rural tourism is emerging as an important segment. Rural tourism has countless variants, tourists spend time on leisure activities or education in a rural environment and local communities are involved that can be referred as rural tourism. The relationship between tourism and the environment is particularly close in rural areas. **Thomas cook** was the first person who organized a package tour to rural Switzerland in 1863. The rapid industrialization and urbanization has forced the people to move out of villages. This is the main reason for the development of rural tourism because the parents are keen to show their children the idyllic surroundings of their native villages. **The attractiveness of rural areas for tourism is closely related to the traditional idea of the “good old days”.**

TamilNadu has tremendous potential in rural tourism, where almost the important tourist destinations are situated in around the rural areas. Tamil Nadu State Tourism Department has identified rural tourism areas for development. TamilNadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) has initiated several initiatives to promote tourism in the rural areas.

Many tourist destinations in panchayat union areas have been funded copiously to promote domestic tourism. TamilNadu tourism is keen to market rural areas to urban dwellers to change their mind set and make them understand the significance of agriculture, the art and crafts of the villages, tradition and way of life of the villagers.

Tourism in the rural areas needs to be given an impetus by earmarking funds for pilot projects on the basis of the model plan for each state for the purpose. Madurai is a land of culture and heritage. The villages of Madurai have the rural cultural attractions.

The Government of TamilNadu and the Department of Tourism and other Tourism relates organizations need to arrange tourism activities in line of the rural culture so that the region roars in rapture.

Objectives

The concept of rural tourism has a noble cause; it is another kind of sustainable tourism. The Main aim of the study is to measure the potential of rural tourism in Madurai district with the specific objectives:

- To find out the impact of rural tourism in our society.
- To understand the potential of rural tourism
- To identify the challenges and problems faced by Tourists in this Area.
- To identify the essential elements for development of rural tourism.
- To offer suggestions for improving tourist development scheme for rural tourism.
- To develop the living standard of the rural people by way of giving employment opportunity through the tourism Industry.
- To create an awareness among the rural people about the preservation of historical and cultural valuable destinations of their premises.

Methodology

The study has been conducted in Madurai district, in Tamil Nadu. The sample respondents comprised of both tourists and different socio-economic status of the society. The empirical data has been collected to understand the potential for rural tourism to evaluate its positive and negative impact of the society especially in the area of environment, economy socio and cultural field.

- Primary data will be collected from the 100 respondents by giving them a detailed questionnaire.
- The secondary Data will be collected from different sources like books, journals, research papers, articles, reports and unpublished records.

Research Design

The present study will be empirical nature as the research herself desires to go and cover all the regions in the district personally to ascertain the nature of Rural Tourism through well-structured Interview schedule to elicit the information and data from the Tourists and villagers on various problems faced by them.

Area of the Study

Attempt has been made to probe into the impact of rural tourism in Madurai district. It has both positive and negative impacts on rural communities. This project describes the role of tourism for sustainable development in rural areas and stresses the

importance of strategies approach in the planning and development. It is in such context we have to position rural tourism as creatively evolving and evolving creatively.

Rural Tourism in Madurai

To promote rural tourism the local villages were encouraged. Some of the cities were identified and encouraged for rural tourism. To increase the number of tourists visiting there are attempts to look beyond the city. Many foreign tourists were invited to visit the rural areas. In recent times such cities like Madurai become a Centre of rural tourism. **Apart from Cultural Tourism, Health Tourism, Pilgrimage Tourism and Business Tourism, Rural Tourism holds promise for Madurai.**

This rough sketch of the rural tourism map perfectly suits Madurai. **Many attempts made to promote rural tourism (i.e.) Dhan foundation ND Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Travel club of Madurai.**

With an encouraging increase in the number of tourists visiting Madurai, there are attempts to look beyond the city. Though the city of temples has been referred to as a 'big village' in the past, its present stature as a much sought after tier II city by the industry has added to its potential as a preferred destination for tourists. e.g., In 2006-07, 41, 00,446 tourists visited the city, among whom were 99,970 foreign tourists. In 2007 alone, the number has crossed the eight-lakh-mark. The jump, according to stakeholders in the tourism industry, is indicative of the potential the region holds. Though it is culture-centric tourism in Madurai, health tourism has also started to pick up in the last few years. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is in the process of firming up an agreement to provide different 'medical tourism' packages in association with an airline.

The numerous villages surrounding the city are virgin tourism spots and there is no need to create "infrastructure." Several unique attempts have been made in the past to take foreign visitors to the countryside around Madurai. G. Vasudevan, former president, Travel Club, arranged a 'Pongalmela' in a village near Madurai a few years back where a typical rural ambience was created. The Dhan Foundation has been organizing 'bullock cart rides' for foreign tourists. In yet another attempt to boost tourism, the CII is in the process of identifying a 'rural route.' Tourists will be taken along this route to witness agricultural operations, rural festivities and traditional arts and crafts and also to watch birds that congregate in lakes near villages, says Ligi George, former chairman, CII, Madurai zone.

Already, there is a trend in the last few months of foreign tourists showing a keen interest to look at the unseen areas of Madurai, besides the famous MeenakshiSundareswarar Temple and TirumalaiNaick Palace. Many admire the majestic Yanaimalai from various vantage points on the city's peripheries. The flower market near Mattuthavani has regular visitors from abroad. An orderly central vegetable market will be another attraction once it gets shifted from its present congested location near the temple.

Now Tiruvadavur and Tiruvedagam villages in Madurai district have been identified for the implementation of 'Rural Tourism' project of the Union Ministry of Tourism. To attract foreign tourists to Indian villages, the Ministry has asked State governments to send a list of villages with potential for developing tourism from each district. The villages are chosen by the district administration and State Tourism Department.

Conclusion

Rural tourism will emerge as an important instrument for sustainable human development it can help inflow to resources from urban to the rural economy. Environmental management, local involvement, sound legislation, sustainable marketing, and realistic planning are crucial for development of rural tourism. The school children may encourage for excursion, sporting activities like skiing, trekking, camping, river rafting, to study flora and fauna, the native exotic of rural India. Government should try to generate data for decision-making bodies investing for developing the human resources, create adequate facilities and suitable infrastructure like accommodation, roads, airport facilities, rail facilities, local transport, communication links and other essential amenities become essential for development of rural tourism. **The government should promote rural tourism to ensure sustainable economic development and positive social change.**

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