

Exploring Tea Tourism Potentials in Wayanad: Issues & Challenges

Dr. Shweta Saibal Samanta Sahoo¹, Mr. Mukunda B. G², Ms. Mousime Xalxo³, Dr. Ravish Mathew⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Sri Sri University, Bidyadharpur, Cuttack, Odisha-754006, India.
catchsaibal@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Indian Academy Degree College-
Autonomous, Hennur Cross, Bengaluru, Karnataka- 560 043, India.
mukunda_tourism@indianacademy.edu.in

³Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, Indian Academy Degree College- Autonomous, Hennur
Cross, Bengaluru, Karnataka- 560 043, India. mousime.xalxo@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor, Sri Sri University, Bidyadharpur, Cuttack, Odisha-754006, India.
ravishancy@gmail.com

Abstract

Now a days nature-based tourism is gaining momentum in India and has become an important source of livelihood for many local communities. Tea tourism is a form of nature-based tourism. The importance of tea tourism in India is immense as it has a dual impact by creating a tea tourism market and providing a source of income for the local community. Wayanad, the green paradise nestled among the mountains of Western Ghats is a rural district of Kerala state which have the potential to become a popular tea tourism destination in Southern India. Therefore, a strategic development approach is required for making tea tourism more attractive by addressing the current issues, challenges, and opportunities to promote tea tourism in Wayanad District. Through the public-private partnership, tea tourism should be included in the mainstream tour packages, and local tea customs can be conveyed through a variety of activities promoting sightseeing and other forms of entertainment to offer quality tourism experiences of the tea tourists. The study aims to develop a suitable approach for promotion of tea tourism in Wayanad as a tourism destination by identifying the potentialities of that area. To substantiate the research findings the study has employed both qualitative and quantitative research approach with analysis of both primary and secondary data.

Keywords: Tea Tourism, Strategic Planning, Local Community & tourism potential

Introduction

Tea plantation in India is contributing to the socio-economic development of our country. Major tea-growing states are Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, and Karnataka. Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal are also known for traditional tea-growing states (Soni et al., 2015). Overall India is

one of the leading countries known for tea production. The other leading producers are China, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Vietnam. Millions of farmers depend upon tea for their living, because the tea industry provides employment and direct means of livelihood. Tea is the widely consumed beverage in the world ranked second. It is considered a healthy drink and has a productive life span of over 100 years. Tea was discovered in India in 1823. Robert Bruce, a British military officer, while traveling through the hilly regions of Assam he found some wild plants which resembled tea were growing on the hillsides (Purkayastha & Kalita, 2016). Samples of these bushes were taken to Calcutta where they were confirmed by Botanists as tea, though different to the species found in China. This type of tea has subsequently come to know as the “Assam variety” of tea, which currently dominates the world tea market.

Tea Industry and Indian Economy

Tea is a major cash crop in India and is one of the oldest industries in the country. Tea plantation in India is mainly located in rural hills and backward areas of northeastern and southern states. Some of the major tea-growing regions of India are Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The other regions where tea is grown in small quantities are Karnataka, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Bihar, and Orissa. Major plantation districts in South India are Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Salem, Dindigul, and the high ranges (McKay & Blumberg, 2002).

(Cabrera et al., 2006) Tea is the second biggest Foreign Exchange Earner and is exported to 80 countries and contributes a sizeable amount to the national income. Further certain varieties of tea are grown only in India and are in great demand across the world. Darjeeling teas possess the lightness of flavor and the fine coloring that set them apart from all other teas. The tea industry provides direct gainful employment to a large number of people and helps in providing indirect employment in various sectors associated with it. Tourism has occupied a significant position in the economy of a country of the present era as an industry earning Foreign Currency and strengthening the national economy. The development of tea tourism, nourishing the environment, and preserving the heritage and culture, will benefit the destination by creating employment opportunities and boosting the rural economy, and thereby alleviate the insurgency and other socio-economic problems. If tea tourism is highlighted with proper planning and proper prospects, it can help the Govt. to earn much revenue and also create a new shape of the region on the map of the world tourism sector.

Tea Tourism in India: An Overview

India, one of the top tea producers in the world promoting tea tourism because of the growing interest shown by tourists to visit tea plantations and tea factories. Ambling through a sprawling tea plantation with greenery all around in the early hours of the day watching a group of local women plucking two leaves and a bud at a fast pace with their nimble hands and collecting them into baskets slung on their shoulders is a winning sight for tourists. India now leads to giving tea-buffs and tourists a closer understanding of tea by organizing tea tourism at places like Assam,

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Darjeeling (West Bengal), Nilgiris belt in Tamil Nadu, and a few pockets in Kerala and Karnataka.

Tea tourism is defined as tourism that is motivated by an interest in the history, culture, traditions, and consumption of tea. Estate bungalows amidst sweeping acres of manicured tea plantations have now been converted into tourist accommodations. Not just staying amid tea gardens, tea tourists are taken to a tea factory, where they get to experience how the fresh green leaves are brought into the tea factory for withering to the rolling, drying, and shifting stages, grading and packaging and followed by a tea-tasting session where they could sip some of the finest tea that is grown in that area. The first name that crops up in mind for tea tourism is Assam, the largest tea-producing region in India. The Assam Tea Tourism Festival held at Jorhat every year is a big hit with tourists. Staying in a rustic colonial-era planter's bungalow has its charm. Home to more than 800 tea estates in the state, where amidst luxury and serenity one can drift back in time to days of that elegant colonial aristocracy. West Bengal is also fast catching up with Assam in promoting tea tourism. The Government has considered tea tourism to benefit tea plantations in the state. The West Bengal state government permits one acre of tea estates to be used for tourism purposes. Currently, there are 87 operational tea gardens in the Darjeeling district covering an aggregated area of about 19,000 hectares under tea plantation.

Besides the Northeast belt, in the south, it is Tamil Nadu which is home to some of the largest tea-growing belts in the country. Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu is the largest tea-producing district in South India, and its tea is renowned for its aroma and flavor. With Tamil Nadu producing 65% of tea in South India spanning an area of 65,000 hectares, the Nilgiris area offers great scope for tea tourism. Valparai, a quaint hill station located about 100 km from Coimbatore, is teeming with tea plantations. Billimalai Tea Estate at Glendale, about 10 kilometers from Coonoor, is a perfect place to experience how tea is processed. Munnar in Kerala is a rustic belle of hill stations where acres and acres of tea plantations feast on one's eyes. A visit to the country's first Tea Museum at Nallathanni Estate is highly recommended as it narrates the history of tea production in the region. The Kundala Tea Plantation in Munnar offers tourists the tea-making process in great detail. Tea Sanctuary here is home to refurbished vintage colonial-style bungalows amidst misty tea plantations. Considered the highest altitude tea plantation in the world, Kolukkumalai, near Munnar, is known for preserving the British heritage in tea-making at the factory here. Wayand in the Kalpatta district produces a substantial amount of tea whose lush green tea gardens are a feast for the sore eyes. The Wayand Tea County amid the picturesque 395-acre estate, many vantage viewpoints, and trekking routes is a better option. In Karnataka, Coorg, and the Baba Budan Hills in Chickmagalur are tea-producing regions, but tea tourism is yet to be promoted there.

Review Literature

India is one of the largest tea-producing and exporting countries in the world. The four major tea-producing states are Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Tea is an evergreen plantation crop that grows in the tropical regions of Asia. It is called the best beverage and is one of the most popular healthy beverages across the world. Tea is manufactured from young shoots of tea bushes. (Gupta et al., 2020.) Tea is the second most popular drink in the world. For several developing countries, it is an important commodity in terms of jobs. The tea production and tea products are facing challenges such as situations, consumption, and trading of tea. The challenges are weather conditions, planted area, population, age of tea bushes, labor, capital, price of inputs, and yield risk. The factors taken to be affecting global consumption are income of the country and quality of tea. (Karanth & DeFries, 2010).

Tea tourism is one of the alternative forms of tourism which is being operated in the tea-growing regions in the world. (Koththagoda & Thushara, 2016). Tea is a social custom and as such is part of many celebrations that tourists could experience (Jolliffe, 2007). Tea tourism is “tourism that is motivated by an interest in the history, traditions, and consumption of tea.” (Jolliffe, 2007).

Tea Tourism is a contemporary concept researched and talked about since the beginning of the 21st century. It is a wonderful tourism concept associated with tea gardens. The tea gardens, the process of tea plucking, tea-producing, cultural festivals of the tea tribes, and staying at the tea bungalows are part of this tea tourism. This is a kind of unique tour experience connected to nature. Tea tourism is already popular in countries like China, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and India (Kuamarand & Bhowmick,2016) Tea related tourism has parallels with food-related tourism such as wine tourism, which has been investigated by many researchers (Dembardt, 2003; Williams and Dossa 2003; Brown et al 2007).

As pointed out by Jolliffe (2007) that tea tourism has a lot in common with wine tourism in terms of its history and the connections with travel. In the industry, it has already become a niche tourism program in many regions in China, such as Hangzhou, Wuyi Mountain area, Wuyuan, and Xinyang, (Shen, 2005; Huang & Wang, 2005; Shen, 2007) Zhang (2004) indicates that tea tourism has developed to showcase tea planting areas with the beautiful natural environment or special historical heritage.

Tea culture (local tea customs) is conveyed through a variety of activities promoting sightseeing, learning, shopping, and other forms of entertainment and tourism experiences. Tea in Kerala has the unique advantage of being grown in a wide variety of agro-climatic zones, gives rise to a range of distinct teas, each with a unique quality attribute such as strength and black leaf appearance, the brightness of cup, aroma, and flavor.

The tea industry in Kerala is the backbone of the agricultural sector of the state. Wayanad and Idukki are the major tea-producing districts in Kerala (Kurian, 2013). Kerala has the unique advantage of being highly suitable for ready-to-drink teas, such as ice tea and flavored teas. The

earliest record of commercial planting of Tea in Kerala was in the year 1875. Tea cultivation caught on in Wayanad in 1889 and planting was taken up on a large scale in the district. There are seven districts in Kerala which are cultivating tea. These districts are Idukki, Wayanad, Palakkad, Pathanamthitta, Thiruvananthapuram, Thrichur, and Malappuram (Thimm & Karlaganis, 2020). The tea workers are dissatisfied with their working conditions such as long-distance working place, lack of resting place and latrine facilities at the workplace, (Joseph, 2012)

Statement of the problem

The study area is confined to the Wayanad district of Kerala. Wayanad is called the tea town which comprises five major tea estates currently popular and visited by many tourists. However due attention is not given by the Government to the promotion of tea tourism in Wayanad. Lack of Government support & financial problem, lack of tourism expertise of the local community, labor problems, poor tea tourism product knowledge are the major barriers to the promotion and development of tea tourism in the study area. As more tourists are inclined towards tea tourism for a variety of purposes, some strategic actions are required for the development and promotion of tea tourism in Wayanad to satisfy different motives of tourists and offer them a quality experience.

Objectives of the study

- To identify and assess the potentials of Wayanad to become a tea tourism destination.
- To identify relationship between attitudes, expectation and destination attributes.

Hypotheses

- H01: There is no relationship between tourist and destination attributes in Wayanad
- H02: There is no relationship between expectation on service providers and destination attributes

Methodology and Design

To substantiate the research findings, the study has employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and exploratory research design has been used. The study involves the collection of both primary and secondary data. The secondary data was collected from other sources such as travel reports and other published articles. A research questionnaire was designed based on the objectives of the study and administered to the tourists at various tourist destinations of Wayanad. The first section of the questionnaire aimed at obtaining demographic information of respondents namely gender, age, and educational level. The second section of the questionnaire consists of questions that are based on tourist attitude, creating unique learning experiences, and developing skills through tea tourism. Questions related to destination attributes are included in the questionnaire. The questions emphasized more on tourist attitude, tourist

interest, and destination attributes. Tourist interest is influenced by a variety of factors which include, economy, socio-demographic, and attitude towards tea tourism in Wayanad.

Thus, according to this formula, the study is designed to collect responses from a minimum of 385 tourists, which implies that when the sample size reaches 385, the sample can be considered a strong presence of the study population.

Tools for data analysis

The SPSS 24 (Statistical Package for the Social Science) was used to analyse the data. A test to determine the normality of the data, the Shapiro Wilk test was done which showed that the data in this study was Normal data.

Demographic Characteristics

The respondent's demographic characteristics are summarised in **Table 4.1**. A total of 385 questionnaires were taken from secondary data. Demographic data collected for the study included gender, education level and age. Among the 385 respondent, 51.9% were male and 49.1 % were female. In terms of education level, it was found the majority of the respondents were graduate 66.3% followed by 33.7% postgraduate. Analysis of age showed that the majority of the respondents belonged to age group 21-30 yrs., 77.3% followed by less than 20, and 13.1%.

Table 4.1

Sample Distribution			
Variable	Value	Count	Percent
Age	< 20yrs	53	13.1%
	21 - 30 yrs.	314	77.3%
	> 31 yrs.	39	9.6%
Marital Status	Single	328	80.8%
	Married	78	19.2%
Education	Graduate and below	269	66.3%
	Post Graduate and above	137	33.7%
	Professional	155	38.2%
Occupation	Service	60	14.8%
	Student	191	47.0%
	Domestic	380	93.6%
Nationality	International	26	6.4%
Gender	Male	207	51.0%
	Female	199	49.0%

Objective 1: To identify potentials of Wayand to become a tea tourism destination

Table 4. 2.1

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std Deviation	N
Tourist potential	3.05	.781	385
Destination attributes	1.34	.656	385

The mean value of tourist potential in Wayand is **3.05** and destination attribute is **1.34**. The above table indicates that tourist’s potential is more than destination attributes. It indicates that tourist potential increases if there are attributes in the destination to attract tourists. The result shows that there is a positive response if destination attributes is maintained in Wayand destination that can lead to tourist’s satisfaction.

The result indicates that tourist potential excited more and is enhanced if there are attributes in the destination to support Wayand as the tea plantation district. Destination attribute include host community, climatic conditions, infrastructure facilities, amenities and environment.

- Hypothesis1: There is no relationship between tourist and destination attributes in Wayand

Table 4. 2.2

Correlation			
		Tourist potential	Destination attributes
Tourist potential	Pearson Correlation	1	.365**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Destination attributes	Pearson Correlation	.365**	1
	Sig(2 tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

Tourist potential and destination attributes shows a significant relationship. The relationship is positive (i.e. Tourists potential and destination attributes are positively correlated), meaning that these variables tend to increase together. If the Significant value (p) is less than .05 then it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between tourist potential and destination attributes. Pearson correlation (**r**) value has **.365** which shows a moderate positive relationship. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected and concludes that there is a moderate positive relationship between tourist potential and destination attributes.

Objective 2: To identify relationship between attitudes, expectation and destination attributes

Table 4.3.1

	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Tourist attitude and expectation	385	3.961	1.3985
Destination attributes	385	2.703	1.3976

Tourist attitude and expectations are having the highest mean value of 3.961 and destination attributes is having the lowest mean value of 2.703. Tourist attitude plays a vital role in tourism towards tourism product or destination. Positive attitude brings tourist to the destination and helps in building positive image whereas negative attitude invites less tourists to the destination and creates a weak image about the destination. Therefore, Wayand tourism should concentrate more on building positive attitude and match the expectations of the tourists.

Hypothesis 2:There is no relationship between expectation on service providers and destination attributes

Table 4.3.2

Correlation			
		Tourists satisfaction	Revisit Intension
Tourists attitude and expectation	Pearson Correlation	1	.345**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Destination attribute	Pearson Correlation	.345**	1
	Sig(2 tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

If the Significant value (p) is < .05 then it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between tourist attitude, exception and destination attributes. Pearson correlation (**r**) value has **.345** which shows a significant positive relationship between tourist attitude, expectation and destination attributes.

Hence the null hypothesis is rejected and concluded that there is a positive significant relationship between the two variable.

Findings of the Study

From the above data analysis, it is found that there is the potential of tea tourism in Wayanad because of its attributes like pleasant climate, natural environment, motivation of community, and tourism facilities available. It plays a crucial role in income generation, Foreign Exchange Earnings, and employment generation both directly and indirectly. Destination attributes help in increasing the opportunities for tourism development. The land in Wayanad is more suitable to grow tea. Currently, due to a lack of financial supports from the Government, the motivated local community are not able to own any tea estate and cultivate tea.

Tea is a high labor-intensive industry and usually, the wages paid for tea industry laborers are very less. This made some of them starve and leave out the industry. Tea plantation is considered as an attraction for tourists in Wayanad because most of the estates have tea plants 60 to 100 years old. Most of the tourists participate in plucking tea leaves and learning making types of tea and tea tasting. However, the tea estates as a tourism product are not packaged properly. The

existing infrastructure near the tea estate are also not up to the mark. Poor road conditions or sometimes non-accessibility of road and poor solid waste management, unreliable communication system fails to attract the tourists. There has been a lack of coordination between the Government bodies and private sectors to design suitable tea tourism products and promote them. The government also has not developed a policy framework for the promotion of tea tourism in the state. Many of the local people are also not aware of the socio-economic and cultural benefits of tea tourism.

Recommendations

One of the major problems faced by the tea industry is worker turnover as they are not paid according to their satisfaction. The employer is not able to pay high wages to the workers despite working for so long. Consequently, the workers are attracted toward some other industries to work. Hence the tea estate owners/managers should focus more on paying the wages to workers on time and by providing basic facilities for them like accommodation, sanitation facilities, transportation facilities especially for the migrant workers from the neighboring states. As infrastructure is very much essential to operate any type of tourism in a destination. Facilities such as accommodation, roads, and other communication, transport, electricity and water supply, information guides, etc. should be upgraded and constructed. More eco-friendly accommodation such as homestays, cottages & huts must be provided in and around the tea estates as demanded to be tea tourists.

Support of the government financially and non-financially is required to encourage the local community to come up with more tea estates in Wayanad. The estate owners must be supportive and cooperative to develop a good destination image of tea tourism. The local tea customs and traditions should be one of the important components while designing tea tourism products. Attributes such as tea museums, audio-visual displays, tea festivals, local art and crafts, traditional cuisines, entertainment, and adventure activities must be taken into consideration while developing estates as tea tourism destinations. They can formulate different strategies to preserve these estates' environmental balance as well as tourism potentialities to develop a good destination image of tea tourism. Tourism skill development training is required to be provided to all the employees of tea estate so that they can deliver the right services to the tourists professionally. The Government and private sectors such as -tour operators, travel agents & suppliers, and local people should work hand in hand for including tea tourism in the mainstream tour package and promoting it in the domestic and international tourist market through more promotional tools like social media, magazine, brochures, and newspaper, etc.

Conclusion

Wayanad is primarily an agricultural district. The cultivation of tea on a large scale in the hilly tracts proved a real success and the experience paved the way for the growth of tea plantations in Wayanad. Tea tourism in Wayanad is still in evolving stage. More and more tea estates are

coming forward and opening up their gardens and bungalows to the tourists. There was a time when such tea tourism was limited to the directors of the estates and owner families. Other than the accommodation, a lot many activities are now being added including nature & village hikes, eco-adventure activities, experiencing tea garden life & local culture, sightseeing tours, organic food, etc. While this acts as an additional source of revenue for the management, it also helps to create more jobs for the villagers who work in such tea garden retreats and also in associated activities. The tea tourism potential in Wayanad needs to be exploited and the issues and challenges associated with it as discussed in the findings need to be addressed to attract more tea tourists. with the inflows of more tea tourists within the framework of sustainable development. It could bring a lot of socio-economic benefits for the local community.

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