

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry has steadily acquired an increasingly significant position in the global economy. A naive impression of it may illustrate the industry merely as a provider of basic facilities with a view to meet the expectations and perceptions of the tourists. A closer look would, however, reveal that, it incorporates and entails a whole set of complex factors and forces. Tourism promotes people-to-people contacts, ethnic cultural understanding, mutual appreciation and co-operation, thereby promoting peace. The development of tourism depends on various factors such as attraction, accommodation, transportation, recreation, restaurants, shopping, hospitality, safety and security, attitude of the host community, tourist destinations and so on.

In India, tourism has been gaining popularity with the active involvement of Government and other promotional agencies. India, with its diverse culture and geographic areas and its relatively low cost man-power is suitable for the development of the industry. Tourism in India is growing well as is evident from the tourism statistic

Kerala, a State situated on the tropical Malabar Coast of south-western India, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country. Named as one of the "ten paradises of the world" and "50 places of a lifetime" by the National Geographic Traveller, Kerala is famous especially for its ecotourism. Its unique culture and traditions, coupled with its varied demography, has made Kerala one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Growing at a rate of 10 per cent, the tourism industry is a major contributor to the State's economy. Today, Kerala tourism is a global super brand and regarded as one of the destinations with highest brand recall.

Hill tourism is one of the fast growing tourism sectors in Kerala, contributing 30 per cent of the total revenue from tourism sector (Tourism Statistics, Government of Kerala). Eastern Kerala consists of land encroached upon by the Western Ghats; the region thus includes high mountains, gorges and deep-cut valleys. The wildest lands are covered with dense forests, while other regions lie under tea and coffee plantations or other forms of cultivation. The Western Ghats rise on average to 1500 metre elevation above sea level. Certain peaks may reach to 2800 metre. The Kerala hills

offer pleasant and pleasurable diversions that range from going on hiking, biking, trekking and hill climbing tours, wildlife safaris to the numerous wildlife sanctuaries located on the hills. The mist covered Kerala hills with clear blue skies as the perfect background and the evergreen forests that clothe these hills create a visual panorama that heightens the pleasure of all the tourists.

Munnar, one of the popular hill stations in Kerala, known as the Kashmir of South India, became a popular tourism destination very recently and within a short period the tourist flow has increased a lot to this place. This leads to mass tourism here and most of the land area is encroached by the private people for the construction of hotels, shops and other tourism facilities which has caused damages in the environment and on the ecosystem. In due course of time, if these continue, they will become a threat to the existence of this environmentally fragile area. By realizing this, ecotourism initiatives were started in the year 2002 aiming to reduce the tourist flow and also the negative impacts on the fragile ecosystem.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Today, the increasing concern about the environmental protection and the related issues make tourism industry take special efforts to protect the natural resources of this industry from environmental degradation. Ecotourism is playing an important role in this aspect. Thus, studies related to this area will be very helpful to the tourism promoters while developing ecotourism destinations in the future. Though the research has limited to a single ecotourism destination of Kerala, the findings and recommendations may be applicable to most of the other ecotourism destinations of Kerala and other states of the country.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study about tourism
- To study the tourism profile of India and Kerala
- To study about major attractions of Munnar
- To study about tourism of Echo point, Munnar
- To find out the problems faced by tourists in Echo point

1.4 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study, based on both primary and secondary sources of data, is descriptive and analytical in nature.

1.4.1 DATA COLLECTIONS METHOD

Both primary and secondary data were used for this study

Primary Data

Primary data were collected from the tourists who visited Echo point, Munnar through a questionnaire. Some of the primary data were also collected through interviewing the tourist.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from the various books, journals and articles related to the research topic.

1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Time constrain was the major limitation of the study
- Since there is a serious shortage of official statistical information about tourism in Munnar, the researcher has to totally depend on the opinions of the respondents.

Most of the tourists are non-cooperative with the researcher in data collection.

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