

ROLE OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MEENACHIL TALUK IN KERALA

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Abstract

Tourism is an important source income for many countries. People often view vacations and travel as a necessity rather than a luxury. In Kerala tourism is one of the major sources of income. People from ancient days onwards visited pilgrim destinations. Meenachil taluk in Kottayam district of Kerala has some important pilgrim destinations. The study envisages the role played by pilgrimage tourism in the economic development of Meenachil Taluk in Kottayam District. The study attempts to know about the economic development happened in the region and its social as well as cultural impact on the society.

Keywords : *Pilgrimage, Tourism, Economic Development, Social and Cultural impacts*

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Introduction

Tourism has an important role in the development of economies. Tourism relates to "the temporary movement of people to destinations outside the normal places and residence, the activities undertaken during the stay in those destinations". (Adrian Franklin 2003) Tourism today is one of the largest generators of employment in the world. Wedged between the Western Ghats on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west, the narrow strip of land known as Kerala is one of the most popular destinations in the country. Eco tourism, health tourism, pilgrimage tourism are the factors that attract the tourists to Kerala.

The term pilgrimage tourism "implies travel to a site of worship or a sacred place and is a most significant form of religious behaviour. There is an immediate impact on the host environment due to the direct contact of visitors with the religious institutions and also an indirect impact on the local economy and the society."(Vijayanand S 2012)

Origin of the research problem

Pilgrimage tourism may be one of the earliest and most important forms of tourism. Economic development and tourism are interdependent, while as economic development of a society leads to better tourism facilities, better tourism itself leads to economic development. The purpose of the study is to identify its impacts on local people who host these tourism destinations.

Significance of the study

Tourism has become one of the major sectors of the economy contributing to a large proportion of national income and generating huge employment opportunities. India is a land of pilgrimage. Kerala has a number of pilgrim centres important to all religions. Kottayam the land of lakes, letters and latex is fast becoming a pilgrim destination also. Meenachil is the name of the north-eastern region of Kottayam district. The tomb of Saint Alphonsa at Bharananganam, Nalambalam in and around Ramapuram, Kadappatur Mahadeva temple, St.Marys Forane church Kuravilangad are some of the pilgrim destinations in the thaluk which attracts people from all over India.

Objectives of the study

- To know about the economic development in the region through the pilgrimage tourism
- To study the social and cultural impacts of the pilgrimage tourism
- To analyse the contribution of pilgrimage tourism to the standard of living

Methodology

The study is both descriptive and analytical in nature. Primary data for the study is collected from people living in Meenachil Thaluk. It was collected through questionnaire and field visit. Sixty sample respondents consisting of agriculturists, businessmen and self-employed living in the locality are selected for the study. Secondary data was collected from published works, newspapers, websites and journals.

Scope of the study

Meenachil taluk in Kottayam district has number of pilgrim centres for peoples in all religions. All of them offer varied experience for the pilgrimage tourists. The paper is intended to make a study on the role of pilgrimage tourism in the economic development of Meenachil taluk.

Findings

- 78% of the respondents opined that the tourism enhanced their income level. The respondents have the opinion pilgrimage tourism help them to grow economically.
- 67% of the respondents strongly agree with the opinion that tourism enhances the image of Meenachil taluk and 9% of the respondents are not ready with this opinion. The remaining 24% have no opinion.
- Regarding the improvements and developments in the region through pilgrimage tourism, 92% of the respondents opined there is major development in the area. The conditions of roads and transportation have improved considerably. There is also development in lodging and communication facilities.
- Another important finding is that there is an increase in demand for local products and this created more job opportunities.
- 80% of the respondents said that pilgrimage tourism influences the moral and cultural value of local people
- 77% of the respondents are of the view that tourism improved their standard of living.
- The respondents are of the opinion that pilgrimage sites enhanced the image of Meenachil taluk and contribute significantly to the development of locality.

Findings

- The following suggestions are obtained from the respondents while conducting the study.

- An independent statutory body should be constituted for the development of the pilgrim centres.
- Government should promote the pilgrimage tourism and take measures to develop infrastructural facilities.
- The idea of eco-friendly development should be promoted.
- A culture of responsible tourism has to be inculcated among the citizens.

Conclusion

The ever growing tourism sector is likely to determine the future of our economy. In a land like ours rich in cultural and traditional values, embedded with scenic landscapes and large number of untapped resources, tourism has a vast scope for expansion. It can be concluded that pilgrimage tourism has an important role in the economic development and it helps to improve standard of living of people in the Meenachil taluk.

Limitations of the study

The study is focussed only on pilgrimage tourism destinations of Meenachil taluk. Data was collected within a span of few days hence the data available is limited.

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