

Unveiling The Dynamics Of Tourism In Athirappilly Waterfalls In Kerala: Exploring Impacts, Challenges, And Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of tourism on multiple dimensions of Athirappilly, encompassing employment prospects, accessibility of infrastructure, illicit behaviours, privacy issues, animal assaults, pollution, and the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study found out that tourism has high potential in the area and it has been a job created in the area. The data indicates that 13.33% of the participants are currently employed in the tourism industry. However, due to the pandemic, a substantial 40% of the respondents who were working in tourism sector have transitioned to different sectors. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the closure of businesses, difficulties in strategizing, and a shortage of workforce. The tourism experience is hindered by infrastructure deficiencies, including inadequate lavatory and parking facilities, as well as concerns regarding road safety. The study emphasises a surge in illicit behaviours as a result of insufficient volunteers and privacy concerns stemming from tourists intruding on the daily routines of residents. The occurrence of animal attacks presents a significant danger and the level of pollution has also increased in the area. The study highlights the necessity of implementing sustainable and inclusive strategies for tourism development in Athirappilly, in order to effectively tackle these challenges and promote the well-being of the local community and environment.

Keywords: Tourism, international tourist arrivals, domestic tourist arrivals, rural tourism.

Introduction

Athirappilly is a renowned tourist hotspot situated in Central Kerala, India. The region is renowned for its breathtaking natural scenery, notably the magnificent Athirappilly Falls, which ranks among the largest waterfalls in India. The region entices both local and global tourists with its verdant foliage, scenic vistas, and profusion of wildlife. This study explores the various aspects of tourism in Athirappilly, including its effects, difficulties, and potential advantages. A comprehensive understanding of the tourism landscape is achieved by analysing different factors including employment, infrastructure, illegal activities, privacy, animal encounters, pollution, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism in the Athirappilly region.
3. To analyse the precise effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism operations in Athirappilly.

This study utilised a qualitative research methodology to obtain a deeper understanding of the effects and difficulties associated with tourism in Athirappilly. A random sample of 30 respondents was chosen from the

Athirappilly village in order to collect primary data. The respondents were selected through random sampling, taking into account individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences in the field of tourism.

Tourist arrivals in various destinations within Central Kerala

Table: 1: Top 15 destinations in central Kerala in terms of foreign tourist arrivals

	Destination	Number of Tourists
1	Kochi City	270032
2	Fort Kochi	135219
3	Kumarakom	49837
4	Maradu	49032
5	Munnar	38967
6	Thekkady	29113
7	Cherai Beach	16987
8	Kalady	15781
9	Guruvayoor	9076
10	Aluva	8803
11	Athirappalli	3241
12	Bhoothathankettu	712
13	Wagamon	617
14	Chavakkad	457
15	Chalakkudi	197
	Total	627874

Source: Source: Department of Tourism, Research and Statistics Division, Tourism Statistic 2019.

Table 1 displays the number of foreign tourists who have arrived in the top 15 destinations in central Kerala. The top-ranked destinations are Kochi city, followed by Fort Kochi, Kmarakom, Maradu Munnar, Thekkady, Cherai beach, Kalady, Guruvayoor, Aluva, Athirappalli, Bhoothathankettu, Wagamon, Chavakkadu, and Chalakudi. Athirappalli is ranked eleventh.

The table below displays the number of domestic tourist arrivals by destination.

Table 2: Top 15 destinations in central Kerala in terms of domestic tourist arrivals

	Destination	Number of Tourists
1	Kochi City	2795880
2	Guruvayoor	2107849
3	Munnar	1139508
4	Kumarakom	501247
5	Thekkady	402313
6	Aluva	290581
7	Kalady	278277
8	Fort Kochi	261570
9	Athirappalli	211275
10	Maradu	179708
11	Cherai Beach	120286
12	Chavakkadu	64271
13	Wagamon	47379
14	Chalakkudi	19258
15	Bhoothathankettu	15906
	Total	8435308

Source: Department of Tourism, Research and Statistics Division, Tourism Statistic 2019.

Table 2 shows that Kochi city has the highest number of domestic tourist arrivals in central Kerala, followed by Guruvayoor, Munnar, Kumarakom, Thekkady, Aluva, Kalady, Fort Kochi, Athirappalli, Maradu, Cherai beach, Chavakkad Wagamon, Chalakkudi, and Bhoothathankettu.

The impact of tourism on Athirappalli

1. The impact of tourism on job prospects: The tourism and related sectors employ 13.33% of the respondents. 40% of the participants were previously employed in tourism-related occupations as their means of sustenance. However, as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, they have transitioned to alternative industries. 46.67% of the participants rely on alternative industries for their means of living.

2. The impact of tourism on the availability of infrastructure: A total of 32% of the participants indicated a dearth of public lavatory facilities. 2% of the participants reported encountering challenges with the availability or quality of drinking water amenities. 12% of the participants encountered constraints in parking facilities. A total of 54% of the participants voiced apprehensions regarding the safety of roads. The study indicates that the current infrastructure facilities in the area are antiquated and insufficiently maintained.

3. There has been a rise in illicit activities at the Athirappally tourist spot. The dearth of volunteers in tourist destinations has resulted in a surge of illicit activities in the Athirappally tourist spot.
5. Incidents of animals causing harm to individuals or causing damage to property: 37% of the participants have encountered animal assaults, resulting in destruction to their residences and other assets.
6. Escalation of pollution as a result of tourism: 18% of the participants indicated a rise in air pollution as a result of tourism. A majority of the participants, specifically 62%, reported a rise in sound pollution. The study's findings indicate that tourism has had a detrimental impact on pollution levels within the study area.
7. The influence of tourism on the quality of life: 12% of the survey participants voiced apprehensions regarding the surge in security challenges in the area and discontentment with the government's security protocols. 47% of the participants express satisfaction with the government's security measures, whereas 18% indicate dissatisfaction. 82% of individuals expressed contentment with the government-provided transport amenities in tourist destinations, whereas 18% conveyed discontent. The government's support during the Covid-19 pandemic was deemed satisfactory by 87% of the respondents, while 16% expressed dissatisfaction.
8. The ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism industry: The tourism industry encountered financial challenges, resulting in the closure of businesses. The closure of tourist attractions in Athirappilly during the lockdowns had a detrimental impact on the tourism industry. Tour agents faced challenges stemming from a dearth of strategic planning and insufficient personnel in unpredictable conditions. Private enterprises profited from the situation.

Suggestions

1. Addressing the digital divide between rural and urban regions is crucial for promoting inclusive growth in rural tourism and ensuring equal access to digital resources. The government ought to ensure dependable internet connectivity in rural regions, facilitating the transition into intelligent rural destinations.
2. Creating a dedicated app specifically for rural tourism is crucial. This application aims to establish connections between local tourism facilities, while imposing minimal charges and refraining from collecting any commission from local business owners. Registration should be limited to enterprises owned exclusively by local individuals, in order to encourage their active participation and facilitate income generation.
3. Government incentives and assistance, such as exempting profit from commission and providing free skill development programmes, awareness campaigns, and training on app usage, will promote local engagement and bolster rural tourism.
4. It is crucial to prioritise the development of infrastructure in rural areas. This encompasses enhancing the infrastructure for electricity, roads, and internet connectivity, thereby establishing a robust basis for the development of sustainable tourism in rural regions.
5. The conservation and policy framework involve the implementation of measures that discourage the construction of large-scale projects and promote the involvement of local communities in tourism activities. This approach aims to protect the natural beauty and cultural heritage of rural Kerala.
6. Gathering periodic feedback from tourists and residents will assist in identifying areas that require improvement, while allocating adequate funds for advertising and promotion will enhance awareness and attract a larger number of visitors to rural destinations.
7. Promoting Inclusive Growth and Sustainability: Involving local communities in tourism activities promotes equitable economic development, increases income in rural areas, and mitigates rapid urbanisation. Additionally, it promotes the preservation of tourist destinations and the natural surroundings, thereby fostering the sustainable growth of tourism in rural Kerala.

Conclusion

The study highlights the difficulties encountered by the tourism sector in Athirappilly. The study's findings provide insight into the employment landscape, infrastructure shortcomings, illicit activities, privacy issues, animal assaults, pollution, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism industry in the surveyed region. It emphasises the need for employment stability, infrastructure development, security measures, wildlife protection, pollution control, and effective crisis management strategies. These insights are essential for policymakers and stakeholders to tackle the identified issues and strive for sustainable and inclusive tourism development in Athirappilly.

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