

Tourism carrying capacity in Ooty – A concern for the local community

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ABSTRACT

Always the most promising industry, Tourism Industry very much plays a vital role in the country's economic development, providing employment opportunities and building the image of the host destination. Agreeing to the above mentioned, one also has to understand that there are many hidden threats and challenges in the industry concerned. The paper doesn't aims in showcasing the negative impacts of tourism, but the need of the hour issues which if left unnoticed is a great loss to the future generation and the environment as whole. This paper is with reference to tourism carrying capacity in Ooty, the prime tourist destination in Tamilnadu with more than thirty destinations. The word Ooty itself brings a feel of leisure and bliss among the tourist, with growing number of tourist every year, the economy is on the prime side, there is employment for all, more and more tourism business is budding. But there is always a question of sustainability. The reason for the question is tourism carrying capacity, are tourist really concerned about the carrying capacity? Are the local communities really benefitted with overcrowded tourists? Will the queen of hills remain the same? This paper is a small opening on the local community peoples concern about the tourism carrying capacity –Which is a challenge to Ooty tourism

Key words: Carrying capacity, Ooty tourism, Tourist destination, Mass tourism

I INTRODUCTION

In less than 10 years, the world Travel and Tourism council expects India to be the fourth largest travel and tourism economy behind China, The US and Germany. Tourism Industry in the recent past have evolved in leaps and bounds, with the advancement of technology and wide usage of social media, there is a huge awareness among the people with regard to new places and travel. This in return had made travel possible for many. This year the Ministry of tourism initiatives will be 15% higher than the last year and the growth will be robust and better times will come in 2018 says Mr. Suman Billa, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, and Government of India. The WTTC report says that India will add 10 million jobs in Tourism sector by 2028, and also 10 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2017 compared to 8.89 millions in 2016. Take the statistics of the domestic tourism again it's a win win situation for the Tourism Industry, with 220.11 millions in 2000 the domestic tourists visits have increased to 1615.39 in 2016 , The increase in the number is very huge for the six years duration. All this shows that the demand is always there for the tourism industry. Tamilnadu is on the first place for the past four years when it comes to domestic tourism according to the statistics given by MOT, with UP and Karnataka being second and third . The percentage share is 20.9 % which is almost 6% more than the second place.

1.0 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study brings out an insight on the intricacies of carrying capacity in Ooty tourism. The abundance of the tourism product and its lavish potential is laid down, with its hurdles due to overcrowding. The study tries to provide information on the concern of the local community and the options for sustainable tourism.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

A significant numbers of research articles, online journals, magazines and daily news papers pertaining to the tourism in Nilgiris and specifically to Ooty tourism have been reviewed in-depth. Personal interviews with the local community have been a major input for the study. The perception and the experience concerning the tourism carrying capacity in Ooty and its menace have been obtained by interviewing managers in accommodation sectors, entrepreneurs, and the local community people. The Ministry of Tourism websites and the Tamilnadu Tourism development corporations' web portal have been used in collecting information

II TOURING OOTY

Ootacamund also called as Ooty, celebrated as the "Queen of Hills" is a popular and most favored tourist destination in South of India. Tamil Nadu with more than ten hill stations as tourist destinations, Ooty which is situated in Nilgiris Biosphere reserve, many with forest areas and water bodies is famous and preferred by many. This is witnessed by the amount of tourists visit this exotic place every year. Situated at an altitude of 2240 mts above sea level and with a population of seven lack people Ooty is a home for tribal community peoples like Todas, Badugas, Irulas, Kurumbas and Kothas. The sub tropical high climate region features mild and relatively consistent temperature throughout the year, maximum being 17-20 °C and minimum being 5- 12 °C . What not is there for the tourists when it comes to touring the Queen of Hills. The 22 acre government botanical garden laid down in the year 1847 is a major attraction. The lush, green, poise, well maintained garden hosts annual flower show which attracts tourists from across the country and globe. John Sullivan, the first collector of Ooty who constructed the 65 acre Ooty Lake is another major attraction. Just 19 km away the Toda tribal's sacred place Pykara River is situated, the river having its birth at Mukuruthi peak travels through a hilly tract. Boating in Pykara Lake lures many tourists around the year. Addition to the above mentioned, many other lakes are situated around Ooty making it a must visit place. Dodabetta the highest peak in Nilgiris is a splendor, a wonderful viewpoint and an important tourist attraction. The Tea factory and museum, where the tourist witness the

tea manufacturing process, The chocolate factory, The Bee Museum, Toda huts and the Tribal museum makes the itinerary packed for the tourists. The Nilgiris Mountain Railway recognized as the World Cultural heritage by UNESCO is a Jewel in the crown. Built by the British in 1908 this steam locomotive is filled with tourists throughout the year. With many historical buildings and Green surroundings and Blue Mountains, Ooty is perfectly christened as the Queen of Hills. Everything seems positive and promising; there is a boom, opportunities, recognition for the destination, but then the question of sustainability in environment, cultural and development is a concern for the local community. A particular tourist destination can accommodate only a specific amount of tourist, if the number exceeds even the best of development will not help, or the possibility of development without destruction is much complicated, the destruction of environment, health and hygiene, safety and security and most importantly the harmony of the locals is obvious with overcrowded tourists. Does everyone have a real awareness on the tourism carrying capacity, is responsible tourism happening is a questing to ponder upon.

III TOURISM CARRYING CAPACITY

The maximum number of tourists a particular tourist destination may accommodate without causing much damage to the tourism product is called tourism carrying capacity. In this concept the effect of the overcrowding of tourist to the local economy, the local community life style and their livelihood is also to be considered. From a focus solely on environmental issues in the 1960s, the concept has grown to have a wider perspective, including social CC and economic CC (Harry Coccossis 2004). Carrying capacity is a complex and variable concept in the field of tourism due to its multiple dimensions that have different thresholds and implications for tourism development (Kostopoulou and Kyritsis, 2006), even though it has significant contribution to sustainable tourism growth (Ceballos-Luscaráin, 1996). Experiences have shown that tourism carrying capacity has proved to be an efficient planning tool applicable in both less developed and highly developed areas (Academia, 2015). In the district of Nilgiris which have more amount of natural based tourism, that too particularly in Ooty where nature based tourism is more two types of carrying capacity can be assessed according to (Maldonado, 1992), the two types are Physical carrying capacity (PCC) and Real carrying capacity (RCC). PCC is defined as maximum visitors who can physically fit into a destination over a given time, which can be calculated with the formula $PCC = \text{Length (Trail distance)} * \text{Tourists Meter} * \text{Daily duration (Hrs/day)}$ RCC refers to the maximum number of visitors that the environment condition and management capacity allows without influencing the tourists demand. In the event of the occurrence of heavy rain at any time or any natural disturbance which prohibits the tourists from entering the place. RCC can be calculated with the formula $RCC = PCC * (Cf1 * Cf2... - Cfn)$

IV ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Tourism carrying capacity – a concern for tourism in Ooty

Ooty with more natural sightseeing tourist spots, the number of tourist arrival is alarming rather growing. Alarming in the sense that, the destination is completely put to threat with the number of tourist arrivals. The government botanical garden has a (Physical Carrying Capacity) PCC of 1533000 tourists /year and (Real carrying Capacity) RCC of 1091795 tourists/year. Last year it had an actual arrival of 2865728 tourists, the garden almost tolerated an excess of 17.7 lakhs and odd tourist arrival last year. The boat house had an excess of 7.3 lakhs tourists as the actual arrival. 9.2 lakhs excess in actual arrival in the Doddabetta peak a favored tourist spot in Ooty. The Tea museum had an arrival of 9.7 lakhs tourists arrival, The Pykara waterfalls with an excess of 5.5 lakhs, these statistics look good business for the tourism industry, but one has to see in reality whether it is real good for the local community, are the locals in the town are happy with the traffic and the tourist's population. The cost of living has increased with number of home stays increased says Mr. Parthasarathy a local resident and retired professor. A decade ago getting a house for a decent rent is no issue at all, but today the same house is converted into home stay and rented to the tourists at a cost of Rs 2000/- to 3000/- per night he adds. A walk in the commercial road is unimaginable, wherever you turn there is crowd, with the diverted traffic and too much vehicles entering the town the locals are the real sufferers. There is no season now as the tourist crowd is there all around the year, before we had a room rate for the season and it keeps changing but today throughout the year we have guests and our rooms are filled says Mr. Saravanan, Manager of a home stay near Boat house. Though the government has implemented many initiatives to control the traffic and to manage the crowd; the number in actual arrivals makes it obvious that the whole bio diversity is under threat. Agricultural loss due to change in environment is a major threat says Mr. Gopi, who is cultivating carrots and potatoes near sixth mile. The ecology and cultural impact, the change in tourism economics shows that mass tourism is not an answer for the economic sustenance of Ooty. During the month of April and May which is the traditional peak season of Ooty the locals are completely covered with fear, The tourists from all around come to breathe in fresh air and leaves behind vehicle fumes and litter garbage. The change in livelihood pattern, the loss of infrastructure is also the direct cause of mass tourism. Many of the population have left Ooty, there is a mass population displacement among the local Badagar community, they migrate to Coimbatore and other plains for their livelihood. The municipal administration in the town of Ooty do not have resource to cope with detritus not just in towns, but along the roadsides and outside the towns says News minute – An online news report. It also adds that the local taxi operators made maximum profit during the seasons, but today the number of hires has drastically reduced because of the tourists coming in their own vehicles, even the pickup and drop to the Coimbatore airport has also reduced, as the cabbies are not able to make more than one trip a day due to one way and heavy traffic on the ghat way. On further analysis, majority of the day trippers carry their own food, sometimes they do cook a picnic on the road sides, avoiding the local product and many never fail to leave behind the garbage. There is no use adding more and more to the worries due to heavy traffic in tourism in Ooty, Its very clear even to the green and untrained eyes that the fundamental definition laid down by the United Nations World Tourism Organization is breached in Ooty.

V CONCLUSION

The mass tourism in Nilgiris is eyed as the main source for the economy development. With this threatening number of tourists every year the sustainability is a question to ponder upon. The above article shows the local community concern towards the increase in tourism carrying capacity in Ooty. Few NGOs, like Make Ooty Beautiful creates awareness on responsible tourism. Though the government has made the roads one way for safe travel it is the consumers who should be aware of the responsible they have towards the ecology and culture. One of the initiative taken by the collector of Nilgiris is to collect a green tax of Rs 20 for Non Nilgiris vehicle, this money can be increased, many will not value the meaning when too little amount is paid. The existing fine of Rs 1000 for littering should be increased, many a times the rules and regulation works only with a

strong imposed fines. Why stop tempo travelers and buses alone into the town during season time, stop the complete flow of vehicles and provide service vehicles which will have a positive impact on the environment. The annual flower show and other show which lures lacks and lacks of tourists can be spread throughout the month to manage crowd. The economic carrying capacity which is where a tourist destination which will be able to accommodate the tourists without creating much disturbance to the local activity should also be considered. The revenue earned by the tourism industry shall be used for solid waste management, water distribution and road management. Noise pollution is again a major concern, banning of loud music and honking in the reserve forest areas is a need of the hour. The locals have a very scarce for water during the season time due to the heavy traffic of tourist; this should be understood by the tourism business enterprises and the government administration also. Mr.Rohit Jain , Joint Secretary of the Nilgiris chamber of Commerce , says that though the number of tourist arrivals has increased , the infrastructure in terms of hospitals, roads, pavement, transport, water supply and drainage has not. It is irresponsible and unsustainable to keep losing our belt to accommodating more and more. It is time to start imagining a better alternative says Shobana Chandrashekar, of Make Ooty Beautiful a local NGO. She also adds that change will need to occur at the grassroots level. Will the trend of this mass tourism will make the locals community to lose everything. Eventually one has to think of the future generation too.

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