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The Potential for Ecotourism Opportunities to Reduce Poverty in Yercaud, India

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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Abstract

Unsustainable development worldwide, is leading to a variety of environmental, social and economic issues. Economic growth which impacts these three pillars of sustainability, affects the current populations' ability to meet their needs or those of future generations. For many developing countries, tourism is an economic developmental tool that can contribute to their economy. However, unsustainable tourism, such as mass tourism, exacerbates socio-environmental issues and can be contributory factors to poverty and environmental degradation. Additionally, strategies to alleviate poverty and conserve the environment may conflict with each other, reducing their efficacy. These issues can be most pronounced in popular tourist destinations and highlight the need for a win-win solution.

This research investigated the potential for ecotourism in the Yercaud Taluk, India, by identifying human and physical resources - including the natural and cultural features - available for development. It also identified socio-environmental problems to highlight the necessity for a win-win poverty alleviation and conservation strategy. Yercaud is a popular domestic tourist destination receiving large numbers of visitors, further emphasising the need for sustainable tourism and the vital requirement for successful implementation of ecotourism.

A mixed methods approach using surveys, semi-structured interviews, personal observations and an attractions inventory was utilised. Data was captured regarding tourist preferences and destination attractivity factors based on tourist motivations; resident socio-economic data and incidences of poverty based on the presence of certain indicators; the state of the environment; and development requirements for tourist attractions.

Study findings are site-specific, but the framework can be utilised in other tourist destinations. Results revealed that a tourism demand existed for ecotourism and that there are resources available for ecotourism development. However, degradation of natural and cultural resources poses a risk. Most importantly, environmental degradation significantly threatens the continued existence of the Taluk, including its tourism industry. As such, it is recommended that future development is sustainable, preserving biodiversity, the environment and community features.

Keywords: Ecotourism, poverty alleviation, sustainable development, Yercaud, India.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| CHAPTER 1: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Background | 1 |
| 1.2 Problem Statement | 2 |
| 1.3 Aim of Research | 3 |
| 1.4 Objectives | 3 |
| 1.5 Limitations of the Study | 3 |
| 1.6 Contribution to Knowledge | 4 |
| 1.7 Thesis Outline | 5 |
| CHAPTER 2: Research Site | 6 |
| 2.1 National Setting | 6 |
| 2.1.1 Study Site – Yercaud Taluk | 8 |
| 2.2 Environment | 9 |
| 2.2.1 Geography | 9 |
| 2.2.2 Climate | 13 |
| 2.2.3 Flora and Fauna | 14 |
| 2.2.4 Forest Vegetation | 18 |
| 2.3 Community | 19 |
| 2.3.1 Culture and History | 20 |
| 2.4 Local Economy | 23 |
| 2.4.1 Infrastructure and Development | 25 |
| 2.5 Tourism | 27 |
| 2.5.1 Tourist Attractions | 28 |
| 2.6 Summary | 28 |
| CHAPTER 3: Literature Review | 29 |
| 3.1 Tourism | 29 |
| 3.1.1 Definition | 29 |
| 3.1.2 Travel-based Tourism Types | 30 |
| 3.1.3 Tourist Classification and Typologies | 31 |
| 3.1.4 Tourist Destination | 33 |
| 3.1.5 Sustainability | 34 |

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| 3.1.5.1 | Impact on Environment | 36 |
| 3.1.5.2 | Impact on Community | 39 |
| 3.1.5.3 | Impact on Economy | 42 |
| 3.1.6 | Tourism in India | 45 |
| 3.2 | Poverty | 46 |
| 3.2.1 | Definitions | 46 |
| 3.2.1.1 | Poverty | 46 |
| 3.2.1.2 | Absolute Poverty | 47 |
| 3.2.1.3 | Relative Poverty | 47 |
| 3.2.2 | Causes of Poverty | 48 |
| 3.2.3 | Indicators of Poverty | 49 |
| 3.2.4 | Measuring Poverty | 51 |
| 3.2.5 | Alleviation Strategies | 52 |
| 3.3 | Conservation | 53 |
| 3.3.1 | Definition | 53 |
| 3.3.2 | Ecosystem Services | 53 |
| 3.3.3 | Importance of Biodiversity | 54 |
| 3.3.4 | Reasons for Biodiversity Loss | 54 |
| 3.3.5 | Strategies | 55 |
| 3.4 | Conflict between Poverty Alleviation and Conservation Efforts | 56 |
| 3.5 | Ecotourism | 56 |
| 3.5.1 | Definition | 56 |
| 3.5.2 | Ecotourism vs. Other Forms of Tourism | 57 |
| 3.5.3 | As a Conservation and Poverty Alleviation Strategy | 59 |
| CHAPTER 4: | Research Methods | 60 |
| 4.1 | Research Design | 60 |
| 4.2 | Questionnaire design | 61 |
| 4.2.1 | Tourist Questionnaires | 62 |
| 4.2.2 | Resident Questionnaires | 63 |
| 4.3 | Pretesting, Pilot Study and Implementation | 64 |
| 4.3.1 | Tourists | 64 |
| 4.3.2 | Residents | 64 |

| | | |
|------------|----------------------------------|----|
| 4.4 | Sample Design and Implementation | 66 |
| 4.4.1 | Tourists | 66 |
| 4.4.1.1 | Bias | 67 |
| 4.4.2 | Residents | 67 |
| 4.4.2.1 | Bias | 68 |
| 4.5 | Interview Design | 68 |
| 4.5.1 | Bias | 71 |
| 4.6 | SWOT Analysis | 71 |
| 4.7 | Attractions Inventory | 71 |
| 4.8 | Personal Observations | 72 |
| 4.9 | Research Ethics | 73 |
| 4.10 | Limitations | 74 |
| 4.10.1 | Data Collection | 74 |
| 4.10.2 | Sampling | 74 |
| 4.10.3 | Questionnaires | 75 |
| 4.10.4 | Respondents | 75 |
| CHAPTER 5: | Data Analysis and Results | 76 |
| 5.1 | Analysis | 76 |
| 5.1.1 | Questionnaires | 77 |
| 5.1.1.1 | Editing and Missing Data | 77 |
| 5.1.1.2 | Descriptive Statistics | 79 |
| 5.1.1.3 | Contingency Tables | 80 |
| 5.1.1.4 | Correlation | 80 |
| 5.1.2 | Interviews | 80 |
| 5.2 | Questionnaire Results | 81 |
| 5.2.1 | Tourist Surveys | 81 |
| 5.2.1.1 | Tourist Profile | 82 |
| 5.2.1.2 | Tourist Trip Characteristics | 85 |
| 5.2.1.3 | Tourist Group Characteristics | 88 |
| 5.2.1.4 | Tourist Movements | 91 |
| 5.2.1.5 | Tourist Attitudes | 94 |
| 5.2.2 | Resident Surveys | 99 |

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| 5.2.2.1 | Resident Characteristics _____ | 99 |
| 5.2.2.2 | Household Characteristics _____ | 104 |
| 5.2.2.3 | Resident-Environment Interactions _____ | 107 |
| 5.2.2.4 | Resident-Tourism Interactions _____ | 108 |
| 5.3 | SWOT Results _____ | 110 |
| 5.4 | Attractions Inventory _____ | 113 |
| CHAPTER 6: | Discussion _____ | 121 |
| 6.1 | Socio-environmental and Tourism Issues _____ | 121 |
| 6.1.1 | Environment _____ | 121 |
| 6.1.1.1 | Environmental Threats and Issues _____ | 121 |
| 6.1.1.2 | Environment-animal-community Interactions and Conflict ____ | 128 |
| 6.1.2 | Community _____ | 129 |
| 6.1.2.1 | Social Issues _____ | 130 |
| 6.1.2.2 | Tourist Related Issues _____ | 141 |
| 6.1.3 | Tourism _____ | 142 |
| 6.1.3.1 | Issues Facing Tourism _____ | 143 |
| 6.1.3.2 | Issues with Tourism _____ | 144 |
| 6.1.3.3 | Development Required _____ | 145 |
| 6.2 | Supply _____ | 148 |
| 6.2.1 | Environment _____ | 148 |
| 6.2.2 | Community _____ | 152 |
| 6.3 | Demand _____ | 157 |
| 6.3.1 | Current Tourist Trends _____ | 157 |
| 6.3.1.1 | Destination Attractivity _____ | 157 |
| 6.3.1.2 | Tourist Preferences _____ | 158 |
| 6.3.1.3 | Tourist Satisfaction _____ | 158 |
| CHAPTER 7: | Conclusions & Recommendations _____ | 161 |
| 7.1 | Issues and Recommendations _____ | 161 |
| 7.1.1 | Environment _____ | 161 |
| 7.1.2 | Community _____ | 163 |
| 7.1.3 | Tourism _____ | 166 |
| 7.2 | Conclusions _____ | 168 |

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| 7.3 Further Research | 168 |
| References | 170 |
| Appendices | 179 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Map showing location of Yercaud Taluk in India and Yercaud Taluk as outlined in green. | 8 |
| Figure 2: Historic view of Big Lake (Nicholas and Company, 1875). | 11 |
| Figure 3: View of Big Lake in the 80s-90s (Unknown, n.d.). | 11 |
| Figure 4: Recent view of Big Lake (Peter, 2012). | 12 |
| Figure 5: Yercaud temperature averages and extremes based on the last 20 years (Weather2, 2013). | 13 |
| Figure 6: Leopard shot near Small Lake (Unknown, 1928). | 15 |
| Figure 7: Unidentified example of one of the species of frog observed in Yercaud. | 16 |
| Figure 8: Unidentified crab species found in Yercaud. | 16 |
| Figure 9: Vegetation types of Shevaroyan Hills (Balaguru et al., 2006). | 19 |
| Figure 10: Historic photo of a group of Malaiyalis. Males can be seen wearing the kambli draped over their shoulders (Thurston, 2004). | 22 |
| Figure 11: Modern photo of group of Malaiyalis. | 22 |
| Figure 12: Silver Oak monoculture in Yercaud Asambur (Unknown, n.d.). | 24 |
| Figure 13: Fishing on Yercaud Lake (Unknown, n.d.). | 25 |
| Figure 14: Age groups of surveyed tourists visiting Yercaud Taluk. | 83 |
| Figure 15: Combined annual household incomes of tourists visiting Yercaud Taluk. | 84 |
| Figure 16: Highest level of education of tourists visiting Yercaud Taluk. | 84 |
| Figure 17: Number of visits made to Yercaud by repeat visitors. | 86 |
| Figure 18: Total expenditure for tourists visiting. | 87 |
| Figure 19: Tourist state of origin in India. | 88 |
| Figure 20: Location of most common tourist origin in relation to Yercaud. | 89 |
| Figure 21: Travel party types. | 91 |
| Figure 22: Tourist attractions visited. | 91 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 23: External transportation options used by tourists to reach Yercaud. ____ | 92 |
| Figure 24: Overnight accommodation used by tourists. _____ | 93 |
| Figure 25: Destination factors showing mild correlation. _____ | 95 |
| Figure 26: Moderately related tourist activities and services. _____ | 97 |
| Figure 27: Correlated tourist experiences. _____ | 99 |
| Figure 28: Distribution of surveyed residents' ages. _____ | 101 |
| Figure 29: Number of years of education undergone by residents. _____ | 101 |
| Figure 30: Work areas of residents within Yercaud Taluk _____ | 102 |
| Figure 31: Residents' combined monthly household income. _____ | 105 |
| Figure 32: Number of households with individuals employed in various fields. _____ | 105 |
| Figure 33: Total number of sources of income for residents. _____ | 106 |
| Figure 34: Debt or savings based on household income and expenditure. _____ | 107 |
| Figure 35: Level of tourist interaction during the past year. _____ | 109 |
| Figure 36: Tourist attractions located near Yercaud town centre. _____ | 113 |
| Figure 37: Tourist attractions located away from Yercaud town centre. _____ | 114 |
| Figure 38: Location of villages visited in Yercaud Taluk. _____ | 120 |
| Figure 39: Remaining shola forest within Yercaud Town. _____ | 123 |
| Figure 40: Location of a rubbish dump in Yercaud town relative to Big Lake and surrounding settlements (Google, 2013). _____ | 127 |
| Figure 41: Outside wall of rubbish dump with some garbage spill over. _____ | 127 |
| Figure 42: Living conditions of those in Melalaganburam. _____ | 131 |
| Figure 43: Inside a villager's mud house with an open flame being used for lighting. _____ | 133 |
| Figure 44: Distribution of shares of LPG across differing household income groups (Ministry of Finance, 2013). _____ | 138 |
| Figure 45: Young boy observed helping with road construction work. _____ | 140 |
| Figure 46: Example of public rubbish bin found in Yercaud. _____ | 141 |
| Figure 47: <i>Papilio polymnestor</i> (Blue peacock) observed near Asambur. _____ | 149 |
| Figure 48: Walking path to Keeraikkadu. _____ | 149 |
| Figure 49: Traditional implement used to remove husks from grains like chamai. _____ | 153 |
| Figure 50: Traditional blacksmith at work with products in foreground. _____ | 154 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 51: Traditional method of cleaning pulping coffee. | 155 |
| Figure 52: Traditional tribal tattoos worn only by women. | 156 |
| Figure 53: Example of locally made product. Made from coffee plant trunks and unique to the area. | 159 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Documented fauna species on the Shevaroyan Hills. | 16 |
| Table 2: Endemic flora species and their distribution (Balaguru et al., 2006). | 17 |
| Table 3: Status of IUCN red list plant species (Balaguru et al., 2006). | 17 |
| Table 4: 2011 Yercaud Taluk census data comparing rural and urban populations (Government of India, 2011). | 20 |
| Table 5: 2001 Yercaud Taluk population characteristics (Government of India, 2001). | 20 |
| Table 6: Educational Facilities in Yercaud Taluk (Government of India, 2001). | 26 |
| Table 7: Medical Facilities in Yercaud Taluk (Government of India, 2001). | 26 |
| Table 8: Potable Water Sources in Yercaud Taluk (Government of India, 2001). | 26 |
| Table 9: Tourist attractions found in Yercaud Taluk. | 28 |
| Table 10: Potential negative environmental impacts associated with tourism in protected areas. | 38 |
| Table 11: Interview Guidelines. | 70 |
| Table 12: Tourist profile. | 82 |
| Table 13: Tourist trip characteristics. | 85 |
| Table 14: Length of tourist stay vs. tourist arrival day. | 86 |
| Table 15: Tourist city of origin. | 89 |
| Table 16: Length of stay vs. state of origin. | 90 |
| Table 17: Group characteristics. | 90 |
| Table 18: Tourist transport used within Yercaud. | 93 |
| Table 19: Yercaud destination attractivity factors affecting tourist choice. | 94 |
| Table 20: Important activities and services associated with tourist holidays. | 96 |
| Table 21: Tourists' satisfaction of their experiences in Yercaud. | 98 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 22: Resident characteristics. _____ | 100 |
| Table 23: Age group vs. number of days worked per month. _____ | 102 |
| Table 24: Alternative skill areas as indicated by residents. _____ | 103 |
| Table 25: Resident household characteristics. _____ | 104 |
| Table 26: Sources of household income. _____ | 106 |
| Table 27: Resident environmental perceptions. _____ | 108 |
| Table 28: Tourism interaction characteristics. _____ | 109 |
| Table 29: Resident skill areas which can be applied towards tourist activities and services. _____ | 110 |
| Table 30: SWOT for developing ecotourism in Yercaud Taluk. _____ | 112 |
| Table 31: Attractions inventory (natural). _____ | 114 |
| Table 32: Attractions inventory (cultural). _____ | 117 |
| Table 33: Evaluation of tourist attractions in Yercaud Taluk. _____ | 119 |
| Table 34: Development and issues with current attractions. _____ | 145 |
| Table 35: Tourist attractions and their assessed current and potential use for tourism. _____ | 150 |
| Table 36: Environmental issues and recommendations. _____ | 162 |
| Table 37: Social issues and recommendations. _____ | 164 |
| Table 38: Tourism related issues and recommendations. _____ | 167 |