



Malabar Literary Tourism Circuit

Introduction

Malabar Literary Tourism Circuit is likely to be Kerala's Next Big Tourism Product!

Malayalam is one of India's classical languages alongside some of the country's most distinguished ones. Literary stalwarts across centuries have contributed to the growth of the language. Malayali literary creativity has transcended borders where novels and short stories have been translated into Indian, and European languages.

Literary Tourism as a concept is very new to India. It is untested and a product can be developed based on successful models from across the world, and assuming travellers' propensity to take to this form of tourism. Field studies revealed that among the Malayali community there are ardent followers of some of Malabar region's writers and every day there are visitors visiting memorials, ancestral homes and other places of interest associated with these legends.

Literary Tourism – A Novel Idea in India

Kerala has been India's flagbearer, so to speak, in tourism. Some of India's most popular tourism products like Backwaters, Houseboats, Wellness/ Ayurveda were Kerala's inventions. The state gifted India with one of the most serene tea destinations – Munnar. Kerala was also the first destination in India to promote monsoon tourism and start a Responsible Tourism Mission and today leads in this field.

In tourism, a destination's success depends on the innovations that are brought about. Excitement around a product's invention will last for a few years and then will become an 'old' product where tourists across different generations would have experienced. As time races towards the first half of the century, Kerala Tourism put forward an idea that could revolutionise India's tourism landscape, and add a sense of formality through Literary Tourism.

The 'Malabar Literary Tourism Circuit' covering the districts of Kozhikode, Malappuram and Palakkad is a proposal to develop an experience for travellers to visit places of interest in connection with literary legends who have shaped the language. The planned circuit's start and end points are near air and railheads which provide access to travellers. Both the ends are located on key routes towards Kerala from Mangaluru/Goa/Mumbai on the Kozhikode side, and Chennai and Bengaluru on the Palakkad side. In a post-Covid scenario, this provides travellers who are increasingly driving towards Kerala to visit these places of interest.

The Circuit's literary destinations converge at different points to allow visitors experiences that are connected with and finds mention in ancient literature.

Further Inroads into Niche Travel Product

Kerala has always championed niche and special interest products. Wellness based on authentic Ayurveda practices, MICE on Houseboats, culinary tours (Kerala's cuisines have repeatedly been acclaimed among the best in the world by international titles like BBC, NatGeo, Food & Travel, GEO and many others).

When planning the product development phase, the most important factor considered was: *'who is this product for'*. Initial perceptions that this is altogether a product for the Malayali population was quickly laid to rest as field visits helped learn that though the Circuit is designed around Malayalam literature, its appeal can go beyond Keralites.

All of the places of interest – memorials, ancestral homes and other attractions had a few things in common. One, they are located deep inside rural Kerala presenting a rustic charm and beauty. Till now Kerala's beauty was mostly depicted in terms of its lush greenery across paddy fields, tea plantations and the western ghat regions. But a new perspective of Kerala's beauty is found in all the spots. Secondly, every place of interest effuses the prevalent lifestyles and cultural traditions from centuries before, right up to the present time. Together, this could create an opportunity to develop a niche, experiential product for a segment that is prepared to spend time and money at the destination.

Consequently, target markets were fixed – Keralites within the state, those driving back to the state, those on holiday from other national/international destinations, and foreign tourists on special interest tours or exclusive culture-related tour programmes.

Particularly among the Malayali community living in Kerala or other parts of the country especially nearby states, visiting all the destinations on this circuit at one go would be impossible for two reasons: one, distance and time required to cover all places; and two, the nature of the product – heavy. As at other places heavy on heritage and culture, travellers will need time to soak in the product. Hence, a ‘Malabar Literary Pass’ is being introduced to enable travellers experience this product within a six-month window.

New Highlight for Kerala and Keralites

The Malabar Literary Tourism Circuit has already evinced interest among tour operators across segments. The travel world is in constant lookout for new destinations, products and experiences. Tour Operators operating tours to Kerala for many years are always on the lookout for ‘something new’. This new concept is being proposed to them and interest is shown.

The Malayali community has taken note of the Circuit and ever since it was announced, clubs, memorial associations have come forward with requests for development at respective places. New sites have been added to slightly expand the Circuit. Though named after the Malabar region, the Circuit, on iDeCK’s recommendation also added Thrissur District’s Cheruthuruthi as the signature contribution of the biggest legends stands tall as an international attraction. Also, a convergence where Malayalam Cinema (cinema aroused interest in many of Malayalam literature works, and most of them were set along the path of the Circuit) was also included so widen the scope of traveller interest.

In future, it is possible that other regions across the Country can demand a similar product.

Literary Tourism Poised to Succeed in India

With the successful implementation of the Malabar Literary Tourism Circuit, other states in India could also develop products on these lines. Some states in India have developed museums and centres based on the life and works of literary legends staggered across places. Similar opportunities to create circuits linking important legends may be a new idea implemented in India’s tourism landscape.

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