

KARNATAKA TOURISM POLICY: POST-COVID ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Karnataka is a 'Theater of Inspiration' where many kings built marvellous monuments, people practise a vibrant culture; a State with its own Shastriya Sangeeta, 8 Jnanapith awards for Literature, countless folk music and dance performances, rich natural resources and IT hub – Bengaluru with global recognition, which makes this State more attractive to tourists all around the world. With so much recognition and attention from the world, Karnataka needs a very strong Tourism Policy which can concentrate on catering to all kinds of tourists' needs. The Tourism Policy of 2015-20 focused on Private Investment opportunities under the specific head of Corporate Social Responsibility in the Tourism sector. The scheme of adopting and promoting Tourism destinations was given more importance. Being a world leader in generating a stable national economy, the Tourism industry concentrates on utilizing technology to the fullest to enhance Tourism. This includes going online for all sorts of applications and giving online permission to run various Tourism businesses across the State. The Present Tourism Policy (2020-25) focuses on building Tourism infrastructure and providing a great deal of importance to the tourists' comfort and safety. Facilitating a perfect investment plan and encouraging Tourism business by granting incentives, subsidies and concessions will be the criteria for boosting Tourism. This paper aims to concentrate on the Tourism Policy of the future. The primary criteria would be to pinpoint on Institutional framework which in turn focuses on assigning primary responsibility as well as the authority to local agencies for the collection, processing and dissemination of the Tourism products. Rural Tourism shows a ray of hope in this post-pandemic situation where reverse migration of population is evident; that is, the people are all getting back to the villages from urban areas. This paper will also throw light on Rural Tourism which includes the concepts like Homestay, Agritourism and Community-based Tourism which are primarily focused on developing the rural community by strengthening the local economy.

Keywords: Tourism Policy, Tourism Infrastructure, Post-pandemic, Rural Tourism, Local Economy

"One's Destination is never a Place, but a new way of seeing Things"

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Tourism Industry has realized its need to reach out to the people in the best way possible to make things happen on a normal note. The "New Normal" as being discussed in several circles, is about a technology-driven and safety-protocolled initiative. Karnataka is also facing the brunt of the damages caused by the pandemic on the Tourism industry that was otherwise thriving very well, thanks to the fact that Karnataka is a 'Theater of Inspiration' where many kings built marvellous monuments, people practised a vibrant culture; a State with its own Shastriya Sangeeta, 8 Jnanapith awards for Literature, countless folk music and dance performances, rich natural resources and IT hub – Bengaluru with global recognition, which make this State more attractive to tourists all around the world. With so much recognition and attention from the world, Karnataka needs a very strong Tourism Policy which can concentrate on catering to all kinds of tourists' needs. This paper aims at unearthing the true needs of the Tourism Industry in the post-pandemic scenario. The paper also refers to Karnataka's existing Tourism policy and the measures that need to be taken to achieve the revival of the Tourism Industry.

SCOPE OF STUDY

This Study is restricted to the State of Karnataka. The Study involves the Department of Tourism, Karnataka, Tourism Industry in Karnataka, the Government of Karnataka's Policies, Rural Tourism Development Projects of Karnataka and the Educational Institutions existing in Karnataka that will ensure Quality Work-force for enhancing the Tourism Industry of Karnataka.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper's primary objective is to concentrate on the Tourism Policy of the future, especially in Karnataka's perspective. The key criteria would be to pinpoint on Institutional framework which in turn focuses on assigning primary responsibility as well as the authority to local agencies for the collection, processing and dissemination of the Tourism products. Rural Tourism shows a ray of hope in this post-pandemic situation where reverse migration of population is evident; that is, the people are all getting back to the villages from urban areas. The second objective is to throw light on Rural Tourism which includes the concepts like Homestay, Agritourism and Community-based Tourism that are primarily focused on developing the rural community by strengthening the local economy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: THE SURVEY

To fulfill the aim of this paper, a survey was being done on the existing Karnataka Tourism Policy and what has to be done in the aftermath of Covid-19 outbreak. It is certainly understood that Tourism industry has indeed suffered a major setback due to Covid-19. The situation is slightly improving, but the apprehensions still exist in the minds of the tourists. A strong policy should be designed and implemented in order to get back to the ever-existing glory of the Tourism industry.

The questionnaire had 20 questions based on two categories.

- Karnataka Tourism Policy
- Rural/Domestic Tourism

The questions based on Karnataka Tourism Policy can be categorized into the Pre-pandemic and the Post-pandemic times. This questionnaire was sent to the general public and the responses were overwhelming. With regard to the Pre-pandemic Policy, the questions focused on "Sakala" – the integrated online platform for e-governance in Karnataka and the position Karnataka garners for being the preferred Tourism destination. With regard to the Post-pandemic Policy, the questions focused on the promotion of Tourism destinations, the on-site sale of Organic Agricultural Products, improvement of Domestic Tourism by reducing the cost of Tourist Operations, Sustainable Tourism Models, Confidence and Safety of the Tourists and the Use of Technology for Screening tourists etc. Giving more priority for Rural Tourism, the questions focused on Inclusive Tourism Development Policy, Private investments, Rural Culture and Resources, Human Resource Development and Capacity Enhancement, Concessions and Subsidies, Homestays, Community-based Tourism, Reverse Migration Process, Employment generation for the Local Communities, Educating Rural Communities about the Opportunities that lie in front of them and Agritourism.

RESPONSES

Out of the 100 respondents, 10% of them belong to the 15 - 25 age group, 44% of them belong to the age group of 25 - 35 years, 26% belong to 35 - 45 years and 20% are above 45 years. 58% of them are male and 42% female. 38% of the respondents are teachers and 35% are employees in various professions. When asked about the favourite type of Tourism, most of the respondents were in favour of Rural Tourism, Agritourism, Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism. This proves the fact that people are interested to go beyond the urban frontiers and achieve comfort in a calm and peaceful setting. 45% of the respondents travel once in six months, 29% travel once in a year, 19%, once a month, 7% travel every weekend. 47% of the respondents agree that Karnataka Tourism Policy positions Karnataka as a preferred Tourism destination in the world. 51% agree that the e-governance portal, "Sakala" floated by the Government of Karnataka is one of the best initiatives to promote Tourism.

KARNATAKA TOURISM POLICY (2015-20 & 2020-25)

The Karnataka Tourism Policy 2015-20 focuses on accelerating and facilitating private investments, encouraging entrepreneurship in the Tourism sector, motivating various segments of society to contribute to its development, and providing visitors with a "total quality" experience from the moment they arrive until they depart. The policy also concentrates on facilitating effective inter-departmental coordination, streamlining processes to improve performance, improving skills, knowledge, and professionalism in the Tourism industry, encouraging local employment opportunities, and supporting the use of ICT-based initiatives in improving the quality of services to tourists. The Tourism Policy of 2015-20 also focuses on Private Investment opportunities under the specific head of Corporate Social Responsibility in the Tourism sector. The scheme of adopting and promoting Tourism destinations is given more importance. Being a world leader in generating a stable national economy, the Tourism industry concentrates on utilizing technology to the fullest to enhance Tourism. This includes going online for all sorts of applications and giving online permission to run various Tourism businesses across the State.

The Present Tourism Policy 2020-25 focuses on building Tourism infrastructure and providing a great deal of importance to the tourists' comfort and safety. Facilitating a perfect investment plan and encouraging Tourism business by granting incentives, subsidies and concessions will be the criteria for boosting Tourism. To stimulate investment in the Tourism sector, the Policy provides smart interventions, appealing incentives, and necessary regulatory reforms. The policy aims to develop a Sustainable Tourism environment in Karnataka, with a focus on providing tourists with a safe and high-quality experience. One of the main goals of the current policy is to generate desired experiences and encourage return visits through a variety of high-quality Tourism packages and products that appeal to a wide range of visitor profiles.

RESPONSES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISM POLICY

An analysis of the responses of the Questionnaire proves that 26% of the respondents strongly agree and more than 57% of the respondents agree to the fact that the Post-covid Tourism policy should give importance to promote Rural Tourism destinations. 54% of the respondents agree to the sale of Organic Agricultural Products in order to strengthen the local economy and boost Rural Tourism. 78% of the respondents believe that the first priority of the Government of Karnataka should be to focus on Domestic Tourism development strategy in the Post-pandemic scenario. They believe that reducing the costs of tourist operations will play a major role in boosting Domestic Tourism. 87% of the respondents agree to the fact that Sustainable Tourism Models should be developed to promote Tourism. 96% of the respondents believe that the confidence and safety of the tourists should be the first priority in the Post-covid Tourism Scenario. 86% of the respondents believe that the new Tourism policy should engage in strategies like coordination, crisis management techniques, comprehensive network and recognition of risks and opportunities. 92% believe that technology-assisted Tourism policy will play a major role in the development of Tourism in the Post-covid Scenario.

RURAL TOURISM: A SAVIOUR FOR THE POST-PANDEMIC SCENARIO

To mention that the Government's investments on the Tourism industry are very poor and that the Tourism Industry is being neglected is not an under-statement. Developing Rural Tourism is the perfect way to improve the Tourism industry with minimal investment. Providing the local community a chance to know about Rural Tourism and educating them on the different nature-based models can help boost Tourism Business like Agritourism, Homestays, Community-based Tourism and Village Tourism. While the former two models are individual-based, the latter two models involve a whole village/community. However, one needs to understand that there is no need for a huge infrastructure, theme parks or resorts, not even a normal lodge is required. All that is needed is the natural settings which have to be preserved. A natural pond or lake or hills can provide the perfect setting for nature walk or trekking. A well-maintained hut or tent or camping sites would suffice. Nevertheless, the responsibility should be shared among the rural communities so that the income will also be distributed equally. There is no need for 20-roomed accommodation which will be enjoyed by just one owner; the entire community should be given a chance with the available resources. Motel, for example, is a small business; it does need little investment though. B&B (Bed & Breakfast) is quite popular in the foreign countries. Tourism entertainment in a rural setting requires no theme parks or resorts. The very local village games like marbles (goli), gilli danda, marakothi aata; agricultural activities, swimming, fishing, bird watching, dairy farming, poultry, sericulture, local styles of food preparation and traditional methods for cooking can spice up the interests of the tourists. The attractions offered in Rural Tourism are the rural setting, gastronomy, rural lifestyle, agricultural activities, the tradition, culture, local festivals, fairs and all the paraphernalia attached to it, for instance, pottery, handicrafts etc.

With regard to the accessibility, bicycles, bullock carts and a village walk are few modes. Technology can be used for marketing, and for attracting people very easily. There are plenty of online websites like AirBnB, Yatra, MakeMyTrip, Trivago, Goibibo, KSTDC etc. wherein the registration can be done. Social media can be utilized for marketing. Internet can be used for maintaining accounts. The Government of Karnataka has to proactively involve in these areas. Human resources should be high on standard and this can be improved by promoting practically-driven Tourism courses. Incubation centres and hospitality services are the thrust areas that should engage in promoting Rural Tourism. One needs to understand that the outskirts of a city/town can be improvised so that the attractions are easily accessible. The nearby villages can be the best locales for Rural Tourism, so it can be confidently remarked that Rural Tourism is the perfect tool for the government for showing a marked improvement in the revival of the Tourism Industry.

Rural Tourism is the essence of Tourism industry. The questionnaire includes few questions on Rural Tourism only to drive home the fact that Rural Tourism development can boost Karnataka Tourism. 86% of the respondents believe that an inclusive Tourism development strategy that involves even the local communities should be designed to promote Rural Tourism in Karnataka. 82% of them agree to the significant role of the Private investments in Rural Tourism development. 94% of the respondents strongly agree to the fact that showcasing rural culture and resources will attract tourists towards the country-side. 88% of the respondents believe that Human Resource Development and Capacity Enhancement together can develop Rural Tourism.

90% believe that Concessions and Subsidies on Rural Tourism Business will encourage the local communities to start business. Homestays and Community-based Tourism is the next big thing in the Tourism industry and 90% of the respondents agree to this. 79% of the respondents believe in the Reverse Migration of the Tourists. 93% believe that employment opportunities will be created if the local communities are encouraged to involve in Rural Tourism by starting Homestays, Agritourism etc. 86% of the respondents believe that Agritourism is an inevitable part of Rural Tourism.

Rural tourism is a unique and participatory Tourism model with an endless potential to generate actual and long-term advantages for a diverse group of participants, both inside and beyond the rural area. It is not just a miracle answer or a saviour to save local communities from their problems; it is a perfect, pre-configured solution to a community's multiple problems. Rural Tourism encourages visitors to spend quality time in an old-fashioned manner by engaging them in different cultural features of the rural areas. In this modern age, people are drawn into a busy work schedule and they are quite detached from nature. A perfect rural setting forces the urban population to escape into it. What they would get is a perfectly calm and silent setting that can heal their inner soul. When tourists start visiting these rural settings, an opportunity is created to do business in Tourism, thus shaping the rural community by bringing benefit both in monetary and social terms. Homestay is a type of Hospitality Service whereby the host shares the residence with guest/guests who visit the tourist destination. On sharing the culture, tradition, food habits and lifestyle of that local community with the host, the guest/tourist would get a chance to experience the true Culture of Karnataka. Once a Homestay is started at any tourist destination, the host can plan on expanding Tourism by adding the Agritourism concept. This can be achieved by providing the tourists an opportunity to involve themselves in agricultural activities and also allowing them to experience the local lifestyle. From simple Homestay, the host can now add value to the Tourism business by including Agritourism. Agritourism is an experience/hands-on training that tourists will get when they involve themselves in agricultural processes. This will give the tourists an opportunity to get back to their roots from which human civilization started. Tourists can be part of the everyday life of a farmer who is involved in various agricultural activities, cultural and traditional practices, celebration, food habits etc. When an individual starts Agritourism with Homestay or any other type of accommodation and starts facilitating tourists, the local communities will slowly start to get involved; they begin to understand the importance of Tourism and plan to facilitate the tourist requirements based on their strength and this in turn leads to Community-based Tourism. Each village will have a farming community growing a variety of crops and raising livestock as well. These different farming communities can offer various products and services which the tourists can enjoy. They can also gain knowledge of life skills and rejoice in the rural lifestyle.

Every village in Karnataka is a combination of different communities who practise various occupations like Agriculture, Pottery, Handloom, Fishing, Arts like Sculpting, Carpentry etc. All these occupations are being practised by individual communities within a village. When these communities unite themselves and work together, they can improve their lifestyle. Likewise, when various communities with a variety of occupational skills come together, it will create a wonderful cultural platform and attract tourists towards it. For instance, the tourists can stay with the Pottery-making family and enjoy their lifestyle or with the Handloom-making family and experience their way of life. Moreover, once the individual communities start to involve themselves in facilitating the tourists, the whole village with various communities practising different occupations will join the moment and get involved in the Tourism business. Village Tourism is about visiting the country-side to experience the true Culture of Karnataka. To know 'Karnataka' in totality, one should know the villages in Karnataka first. A village is a small world with a unique lifestyle of its own. Many little communities make up a village which together showcases the whole village culture. One community can offer accommodation, another one can offer attractions and another can offer activities etc. Thus all the components of Tourism: Attractions, Accessibilities, Accommodation, Activities and Amenities are catered to by a single village. This will facilitate the tourist inflow and employment. The income generation will be equally distributed which in turn will lead to the development of the local economy. Once Village Tourism gains momentum and Tourism business is started in one village, the nearby villages will also start involving themselves in similar activities. When two or more villages come together and start Tourism business, then it will lead to Rural Tourism.

CONCLUSION

Rural Tourism is here to stay. The minimal-investment-maximum-profit idea can help the Tourism industry to survive in the hardest of the times. Tourism Industry responds to a striking factor in human instinct that seems to draw individuals to travel and explore whenever they get a chance. Rural landscape gives a chance to get back to the roots to involve and understand Karnataka's past and future. Karnataka has a wealth of cultural and natural features, particularly in the countryside, which draw millions of tourists from the other States of India and abroad. The new generation, especially those from metropolitan areas, needs to be connected to their roots in order to feel a sense of belonging and commitment to the magnificent glory of Karnataka. The paper concludes with the conjecture that the Government of Karnataka should consider Rural Tourism Development as the first priority for bringing more revenue to the Local Economy through minimal investment. In the post-

pandemic scenario, this concept of Rural Tourism with all its imminent prospects should find a place in the new post-covid Tourism Policy of the Government of Karnataka.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. The present Tourism Policy positions Karnataka as a Preferred Tourism Destination in the World.
2. 'Sakala' - Karnataka Government's e-governance platform for delivery of services enhances Tourism development in Karnataka.
3. An inclusive Tourism development strategy that involves even the local communities should be designed to promote Tourism in Karnataka.
4. The government should encourage private investment in Rural Tourism Development.
5. Showcasing Rural Culture and Resources to tourists will attract them towards the Country-side.
6. Human Resources Development & Capacity Enhancement together can develop Rural Tourism.
7. Concessions & Investment Subsidies on Rural Tourism business will encourage the local community.
8. Would you like to stay with the local community as a part of Rural Tourism?
9. Reverse migration of rural people from urban areas back to rural areas will boost Rural Tourism business.
10. Employment opportunities will be created if rural communities are encouraged to involve in Rural Tourism.
11. Do you think the government should focus more on creating awareness among rural communities about Rural Tourism?
12. Agritourism, which is part of Rural Tourism, will attract tourists from urban areas.
13. Post-covid Tourism Policy should give more importance to promote Rural Tourism destinations.
14. Organic agricultural products grown in the rural areas would benefit rural communities in this Post-covid scenario.
15. Improvement of Domestic Tourism should be the first target of the Government's post-pandemic Tourism development strategy.
16. Reducing the costs in tourist operations will help in boosting Domestic Tourism.
17. The Post-pandemic Tourism Policy should focus on new Sustainable Tourism models in order to promote Tourism.
18. The confidence and safety of the tourists should be the first priority in the Post-covid Tourism scenario.
19. The new Tourism policy should engage in strategies like coordination, crisis management techniques, comprehensive network and recognition of risks and opportunities.
20. Technology can assist in handling Post-pandemic issues like screening travellers, discovering Covid positive cases, tracking contacts etc.

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