

Exploring the Potential of Dark Tourism in Kerala: An Analysis and Documentation of Attractions

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Abstract

Dark tourism has become incredibly popular in the twenty-first century all across the world. The growth of the notion of special interest tourism and changing tourist tastes and preferences have compelled tourism policymakers worldwide to include this segment in their mission and vision statements. Even while Kerala has made significant headway in creating specialized tourism, one particular industry Dark Tourism has not yet been developed. This study examines Kerala's potential for creating and promoting dark tourism destinations, with an emphasis on sites with tragic, cultural, and historical importance. The study investigates how these locations which could include regions impacted by historical occurrences, natural disasters, and haunted or deserted locations can entice tourists interested in the more sinister facets of history. The research reveals new possibilities in Kerala, a state on India's southwest coast by examining case studies and current trends in dark tourism. It also addresses ethical issues and the social effects of promoting these locations, highlighting the need for careful and responsible actions from visitors.

Keywords: dark tourism, tourist perception, tourist motives, destination marketing

Introduction

Travelling today means more than just visiting warm beaches or chilly mountains. It is changing and taking on new forms, such as Dark tourism, which is both exciting and daring. Dark tourism, also referred to as “grief tourism” or “black tourism” is the habit of going to places that are connected to tragedy, death or pain (Stone, 2006). Concentration camps, battle-grounds, natural catastrophe sites, and locations connected to crime, executions, and accidents are only a few examples of these sites. Though dark tourism has existed for centuries, it has recently gained attention as more people visit such sites (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Lennon and Foley (2010), coined the phrase “dark tourism” for the first time in 1996. Dark tourism may

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seem strange or hard to understand, but it appears to be a rapidly growing niche trend in modern India, which helps the new generation to learn about history, including underappreciated heroes and their challenges. The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar, the Kuldhara village in Rajasthan, the "Remember Bhopal" Museum in Madhya Pradesh, the Cellular Jail (Kala Pani) located in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, or the Roopkund Lake (Lake of Skull) a mystery site located in the state of Uttarakhand are only a few examples of the diverse possible dark destinations in India (Biran et al., 2011). This paper seeks to investigate the potential of dark tourism in Kerala by exploring visitors' perceptions, identifying existing problems, and emphasizing the importance of strategic development and promotion of dark tourism locations.

Objectives

1. To research the attitude and perception of tourists towards dark tourism in Kerala.
2. To identify iconic landmarks in Kerala that might be turned into places for dark tourism.

Review of Literature

Dark tourism, also known as thana tourism or grief tourism, refers to the phenomenon of visiting places associated with death, tragedy, or suffering (Stone, 2006). Dark tourism may be defined simply and more generally as the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre. (Stone, P. R., 2006). Deaths, disasters, and atrocities in touristic form are becoming an increasingly common aspect of the modern tourism landscape, and as such, they are increasingly providing potential spiritual journeys for the visitor who chooses to look upon actual and recreated dead (Albattat et al., 2020; Chemli et al., 2020). Every dark tourism destination is connected with death and catastrophes (Ashworth et al., 2015). Although the site contains "intrinsically dark connotations" the experience is not dark (Jordan et al., 2022). Dark tourism destinations can be extremely beneficial to locals' healing processes and increase the resilience and well-being of their communities. (Jamalian et al., 2020) The design and representation of a memorial place have profound effects on visitor experience (Xingyang Lv et al., 2022). The visual sensory experience directly affects tourists' psychological experience. Tourists with darker experience tend to use deeper visual darkness to express their perceived darkness. (Sharpley, Stone, 2009). Dark tourism is slowly getting attention among tourists all over the world (Gagandeep Soni et al., 2017). Although dark tourism may not be the best destination for everyone to go on vacation, there is a cult of individuals who visit these sites of tragedy out of an unusual curiosity and passion (Seaton, 1996, Sharpley et al., 2009). Many dark tourism sites and attractions have not been purposefully created or developed as tourist attractions but have become so for a variety of reasons, such as the fame (or infamy) of people concerned, the events that once occurred there or even, perhaps, the beauty of a building (Sarkar et al., 2021). The popularity of such sites may be enhanced by the marketing and promotional activity of businesses or organizations anxious to profit through tourism; equally, the media frequently play a role in promoting dark sites. Research on dark tourism in India is limited, but a few studies have been conducted on the subject in recent years. Lennon (2017) investigated whether there was a disconnect between the theoretical and practical applications of the ideas of dark

tourism and highlights the conflict between ethics and moral principles and dark tourism. The study places a strong emphasis on the need to alter public perceptions about dark tourism sites. Fonseca et al., (2016) investigated many types of gloomy tourism, such as war/battlefield tourism, disaster tourism, ghost tourism, cemetery tourism, etc and explores how people's ambivalent views on death may influence whether or not dark tourism is regarded favourably as a travel option. Dar, Reshi (2016) investigated the potential for dark tourism development in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. By determining the demands of tourists and adapting the product accordingly, the study advocates for efficient marketing. Gagandeep Soni et al., (2017) One of the prime issues faced by development of dark tourism is less exposure and negligible publicity of the dark destinations. Singh et al. (2016) evaluated the potential of dark tourism in India and identified various issues that could have an impact on it and finds that limited awareness is the main reason why this sector's potential remains untapped. The government has its own reasons for ignoring this unusual form of tourism. Yan et al. (2016) concentrated on the regulation role of emotional response in dark tourism and the motivation experience relationship and concluded that emotional reactions of tourists influence their experiences more than cognitive aspects do. Robinson (2015) investigated the motives and behaviours of visitors at several dark tourism destinations and concluded that education and curiosity are the main drivers of dark tourism site visits. Additionally, the patterns of behaviour of visitors to dark sites were compared to those of visitors to light locations, and a startling discrepancy was discovered in terms of souvenir and artefact collection. Bittner (2011) stated that despite the fact that black tourism sites have been there for a very long time, there isn't much of a market for them. The researcher is attempting to ascertain whether or not dark tourism serves the same function as religious or heritage tourism. The study sheds light on the processes used to create and market dark tourism. Walter (2009) investigated the psychological and sociological aspects of dark tourism and made the case for a middle ground between opposing ideologies in order to effectively promote travel and recognized the media's role in promoting dark tourism and the emotional nature of people, which made the creation of dark tourism as a commodity necessary.

Methods and Data

This study was carried out in selected potential dark tourism areas (Figure 1) in the four districts of Kerala, India, specifically Malappuram, Wayanad, Kollam, and Alappuzha. The locations, Manikkinar in Malappuram (Figure 2), Chain Tree in Wayanad (Figure 3), Punnappra Vayalar Memorial in Alappuzha (Figure 4), Perumon Tragedy Memorial in Kollam (Figure 5) Wagon Tragedy Memorial in Malappuram (Figure 6) were chosen based on their presence of tragic or haunting events, historical relevance and potential interest among tourists. A quantitative research method was employed in the study, using a survey procedure conducted from December 2023 to May 2024. The sample included 100 tourists who visited the relevant areas. Participants' inclusion criteria were: (a) being 18 years or older, (b) having visited or presently visiting the specific dark tourism location at the time of data collection, and (c) verbally consenting to participate in the survey. Primary and secondary data were also included in the study. A standardized questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used in in-person interviews to assess attitudes, willingness to visit, and perceived impacts of dark tourism. It also included open-ended questions for emotional responses, suggestions to improve visitor experience, views on promotion, and respectful behavior recommendations. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS and MS Excel software. In addition, the Department of Tourism, non-gov-

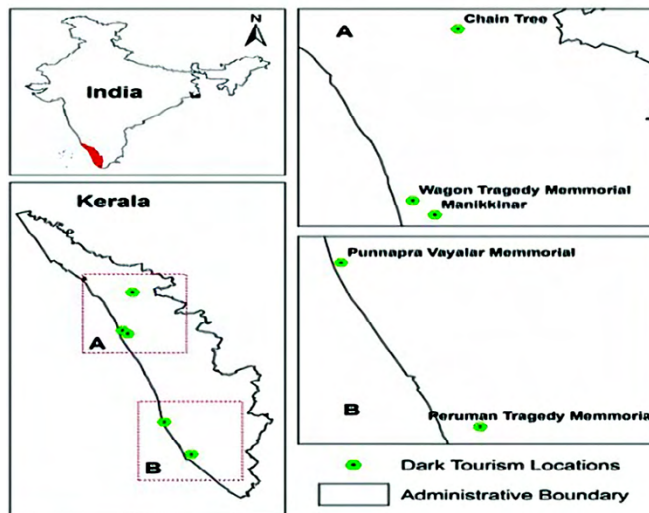


Figure 1. Study Area Map

environmental Organizations, travel companies, Journals and articles published online, were some of the places from which the essential information was gathered.

Dark Tourism in Kerala

Kerala, a state on India's southwest coast, is known for its picturesque landscapes, tranquil backwaters, and rich cultural heritage. These characteristics make it a popular tourist destination, and the state's tourism industry has been steadily growing in recent years (Edward & George, 2008). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the global tourism industry in 2020, and Kerala was no exception. However, with the situation improving and more people looking to travel, the prospects for tourism in Kerala appear to be promising. The state is actively promoting Kerala as a tourist destination, and several initiatives have been launched to attract more visitors. Tourists flock to the state's beaches, backwaters, and hill stations, and efforts are being made to further develop these areas. The state also has a tremendous potential for the dark tourism as it holds rich history and culture, and many of its historical sites and monuments hold dark and fascinating stories (Stone, 2006). With proper development and promotion, Kerala's dark tourism potential could attract a niche market of visitors interested in history, culture and true stories. Some of the spots that could fit into the Dark Tourism category in Kerala are:

Manikkinar, Malappuram

A large well in Thirunavaya called Manikkinar, Malappuram, has a sombre relation to the old festival of Mamangam, which was last celebrated in 1755. The Samoothiri, the king of Calicut, organized Mamangam, which was held on the banks of Bharathapuzha for 28 days once in every 12 years. In order to show their support for the Samoothiri at this event, the monarchs of the nearby territories would send a flag. However, the King of Valluvanad dispatched a Chaver (Suicide Squad) to murder Samoothiri. The Samoothiri soldiers killed or severely injured Chavers, and they dumped their bodies into the Manikkinar (the well), where ele-



Figure 2. Manikkinar

phants later trampled them underfoot. Due to the tragic past connected to this well, which is today a protected landmark by the Kerala State Archaeology Department, it continues to draw large crowds of tourists. This location undoubtedly qualifies as a dark tourism site.

Chain Tree, Wayanad

The mild air and stunning natural surroundings draw visitors from all over the world to Wayanad, but many of them are unaware of the spooky chain tree near Lakkidi. During British administration, Wayanad was an uncharted region with few tribals having knowledge of the way across the hills and jungle. According to a legend, a tribal member by the name of Karinthandan assisted a British engineer in determining the shortest path to Wayanad. The engineer then murdered Karinthandan in order to fully claim credit for discovering the path. According to legend, Karinthandan's spirit has been bothering travelers on that road ever since he passed away. The spirit was subsequently exorcised by a priest and chained to a tree. The chain tree, which is now a well-known tourist attraction, is located close to the Thamarassery Ghat Pass on the national route leading to Wayanad.



Figure 3. Chain Tree

Punnapra Vayalar Memorial, Alappuzha

The Punnapra village's labourers launched an uprising against the local government in 1946 due to its repressive style of rule. Despite the food shortages and illnesses that plagued the peasants after World War II, landlords who were assisted by the police continued to take advantage of them. This sparked the altercation, which resulted in the policeman's death. When the government sent the army against the populace, the situation got even worse and more than 300 people died. The Punnapra-Vayalar uprising, as it is known historically, is thought to be the only working class-led armed uprising against a British-backed government. In order to commemorate this occasion, a sizable Martyr's column has been erected.



Figure 4. Punnapra Vayalar Memorial

Perumon Tragedy Memorial, Kollam

The Perumon train accident in 1988 was one of the deadliest rail accidents ever recorded in Kerala. More than 100 persons were killed when the Island Express, which ran between Bangalore and Trivandrum, derailed at the Perumon Bridge and plummeted into Ashtamudi Lake. This accident is thought to have been caused by a tornado that passed through the area at the time. Right now, a tiny memorial is being built close to the bridge. The victims' families visit there each year to pay respects. Due to this tragedy in Kerala, Perumon Bridge and the Ashtamudi Lake have gained widespread recognition.



Figure 5. Perumon Tragedy Memorial

Wagon Tragedy Memorial, Malappuram

Around 70 Indian prisoners perished in the wagon disaster, sometimes referred to as the wagon slaughter, which took place during the Malabar insurrection against British colonial power in India. In the Malabar District of British India, Mappila Muslims revolted against British colonial control in 1921. Following the uprising, the colonial authorities ordered the relocation of 100 Mappila inmates from the Malabar Coast to Podanur due to overcrowding in the jails in the Malabar District. During and after the uprising, thousands of Mappila prisoners were carried by train to different parts of British India, albeit they were usually conveyed in open-air carriages to prevent asphyxia. However, the sergeant and transport officer in charge of their confinement and transfer sent the 100 detainees to Podanur in a locked train carriage for unspecified reasons. They were placed in the carriage, and the train departed towards Podanur on November 10. They suffocated to death in the railroad goods waggon when the air in the carriage quickly ran out. Inside the Tirur railway station (Malappuram) in Kerala, there is a memorial to the Wagon Tragedy.



Figure 6. Wagon Tragedy Memorial

Results Analysis

Sample Description

Table1. Demographic Analysis of Tourists

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	68
	Female	32	32
	Total	100	100
Marital Status	Single	57	57
	Married	43	43
	Total	100	100

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (in years)	Below 20	18	18
	20-29	25	25
	30-39	22	22
	40-49	20	20
	50-59	10	10
	More than 60	5	5
	Total	100	100
Family Structure	Nuclear	61	60
	Joint Family	39	39
	Total	100	100
Educational Level	Post-Graduation	27	27
	Graduation	43	43
	Higher Secondary	22	22
	Matriculation	8	8
	Total	100	100
Occupation	Students	25	25
	Professionals	33	33
	Business	16	16
	Agriculture	14	14
	Self-employed	12	12
	Total	100	100
Average Monthly Income (in INR)	No Personal Income	15	15
	Below INR 10,000	13	13
	INR 10,000 – 20000	18	18
	INR 20000 – 40000	22	22
	INR 40000 – 60000	18	18
	More than INR 60000	14	14
	Total	100	100
Companion for travelling	Alone	18	18
	Spouse	10	10
	Friends	32	32
	Family	40	40
	Total	100	100

The demographic analysis of the 100 respondents shows that the majority of tourists are male (68%) and single (57%). The age group of 20-29 had the highest representation (25%), followed by 30-39 (22%) and 40-49 (20%). The majority of respondents belonged to nuclear families (61%). In terms of education, the majority were graduates (43%), followed by postgraduates (27%) and higher secondary education (22%). The majority of respondents were professionals (33%), followed by business people (16%), students (25%), and self-employed (12%). In terms of travel companions, the majority preferred to travel with their family (40%), followed by friends (32%) and alone (18%). The majority of respondents had a monthly income between INR 20,000

and 40,000 (22%), followed by INR 40,000 and 60,000 (18%) and more than INR 60,000 (14%). 13% of respondents had an income below INR 10,000.

The Perception and Attitude of Tourists towards Dark Tourism

Table 2. *The perception and attitude of tourists towards dark tourism*

VARIABLES	SD	DA	N	A	SA	MEAN	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
I believe that visiting such places has educational value.	10	10	16	40	24	3.58	1.9045
I find visiting places associated with death, tragedy or suffering to be interesting.	5	16	30	29	20	3.43	1.5814
I believe that there should be regulations or guidelines for dark tourism.	5	10	20	40	25	3.7	1.5125
I think that dark tourism has a negative impact on the local community.	16	29	16	21	18	2.96	2.323
I believe that the local community benefits from dark tourism	2	4	20	40	34	4	1.1
I believe that dark tourism can be respectful to the memory of the victims and the affected community	4	10	22	36	28	3.74	1.4905
I felt sad or uncomfortable during my visit to a place associated with death, tragedy or suffering	4	13	20	36	27	3.69	1.5674
I believe that dark tourism is exploitative.	18	27	20	20	15	2.87	2.2164
I believe that visiting such places is important for understanding history and human nature.	5	12	18	35	30	3.73	1.6714
I believe that the local community benefits economically from dark tourism	4	9	17	38	32	3.85	1.4844
I believe that visiting such places is morally acceptable.	4	10	22	37	27	3.73	1.4714
I think that dark tourism sites should be clearly labelled as such.	10	25	20	28	17	3.17	1.9764
I would recommend visiting places associated with death, tragedy or suffering to others.	5	10	18	40	27	3.74	1.5405

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; DA = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

The study results show that the perception of people in Kerala towards dark tourism is generally positive, with a majority of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements presented. The mean scores for the statements range from 2.87 to 3.85 and the standard deviation for the statements range from 1.47 to 2.323. The study results also show that there is a relatively high level of neutrality among the respondents, with a significant number of respondents remaining neutral on most statements and agreed that visiting places associated with death, tragedy or suffering has educational value (mean score of 3.58), is interesting (mean score of 3.43), and can be respectful to the memory of the victims and the affected community (mean score of 3.74). However, there were also a significant number of respondents who agreed that visiting such places is exploitative (mean score of 2.87) and that there should be regulations or guidelines for dark tourism (mean score of 3.7). Majority of respondents believe that dark tourism has a positive impact on the local community (mean score of 4) and that the local community benefits from dark tourism both economically and historically (mean score

of 3.85 and 3.74 respectively). However, a significant minority disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (mean score of 2.96).

Discussion

Kerala known for its rich culture and history has a number of dark tourism prospects. Based on the results of this study, it appears that the majority of respondents in Kerala have a positive view of dark tourism and its prospects in the region. However, the growth of dark tourism in Kerala faces several obstacles that need to be addressed. One of the main obstacles to the growth of dark tourism in Kerala is the lack of official recognition or promotion of dark tourism sites. Many of the sites associated with death, tragedy, or suffering are not officially designated or promoted as dark tourism sites, which can make it difficult for travelers to find and visit them (Dhatrak, 2020). Also many of these sites are not well-maintained or interpreted, which can make it difficult for visitors to fully understand and appreciate the historical significance of the events that occurred there. Additionally, the government don't support these destinations may be with an intention of the fear factors and emotions of the locals, hence the advertisement is hampered resulting in less popularity in tourism market. Another obstacle to the growth of dark tourism in Kerala is the lack of proper infrastructure and facilities. Many of the dark tourism sites in Kerala are located in remote or rural areas, which can make it difficult for travelers to access them and many of these sites may not have adequate facilities or amenities to accommodate visitors, such as restrooms or visitor centers. Again the branding Image of Kerala is another reason for the non-promotion of dark tourism sites in the state. The Government and travel agents if identifies Dark tourism they will find difficulties in branding its image because of the democratic society opposition. But if they can develop and brand this domain it will add on to a varied tourism portfolio destination to the world. Finally, one of the most significant obstacles to the growth of dark tourism in Kerala is the lack of sensitivity and respect shown by some visitors. These sites are often associated with tragic events and death, and it is important that visitors approach them with sensitivity and respect. However, some visitors may not be aware of the gravity of the events that occurred at these sites and may treat them as mere tourist attractions.

Conclusion

Dark Tourism sites continue to exist in order to preserve and commemorate heroic acts, raise public awareness, and promote domestic and international tourism. Through touching, feeling, reading, and learning in a more realistic way, the visitors will physically experience and comprehend the historical sad events. The growth of dark tourism in Kerala is faced with several obstacles such as lack of official recognition, lack of awareness and understanding, lack of proper infrastructure, and lack of sensitivity and respect shown by some visitors. To overcome these obstacles and to promote the growth of dark tourism in Kerala, it is important for government officials, local communities, and tourists to work together to develop, promote, and maintain these sites in a sensitive and respectful manner. Additionally, proper infrastructure and facilities should be provided, and visitors should be educated on the importance of showing sensitivity and respect when visiting these sites. By addressing these obstacles, Kerala can become a destination for meaningful and educational dark tourism experiences.

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