



A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HERITAGE SITES IN DEVELOPMENT OF EVENT TOURISM IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Event tourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry and hence there is a trend towards an increased specialization among tourists. Events are profound and venerated cultural expressions that create and elevate the image of tourist destinations. Globally, events have dotted a significant place reflecting and glorifying the cultural heritage of tourist sites, and enticing tourists in large numbers. The study of events and its role in place-making is now an important and prolific area of tourism research. Events frequently evolve as important means to enhance economic activities, employment generation and community development through tourism. Events have been for a long time a big draw for tourists in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has a magnificent cultural heritage. UNESCO has conferred World Heritage Status to 5 World Heritage Sites like Chola Temples at Thanjavur, Darasuram and Gangaikondacholapuram, monuments at Mamallapuram and Nilgiris Heritage Train in Tamil Nadu. The state is gifted with all forms of arts which are well appreciated by domestic and international audience. Tamil Nadu boasts of playing host to some of the vibrant events of India such as the Mamallapuram Dance Festival, Chitrai festival, Car Festival, Food festivals etc. The list is exhaustive with splendid variety. The State promoted as Scenic, Serene, and sublime is extremely rich in cultural diversity that ranges from community events to promotional events. This study focuses on how events play a pivotal role in the protection and maintenance of heritage symbols of Tamil Nadu. The cultural and heritage value of the events that glorifies Tamil Nadu's heritage manifestations and make it a brand champion in tourism is studied in the present work. This paper also discusses how events can pool in the local resources that will go a long way in boosting the traditional symbols of Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: *Events Tourism, Festivals, Heritage, Tourism Potential, Promotion.*

1. Introduction

Tamil Nadu is a land of magnificent ancient temples exhibiting the glorious history and tradition of Dravidian art and culture. Tourism in Tamil Nadu has flourished since ancient times. During the glorious days of Chera, Chola, and Pandiya, the three kingdoms of Tamil Nadu, people from different parts of the world had visited the land to take part in the religious-cultural celebrations like the 'Indira Vizha.' The celebrated Chinese tourist Yuwan Swang and Fahien have mentioned about the rich cultural and political diversity of the Tamil people. In the medieval times, Marco Polo and Ibn Bathutha were the famous travellers visited Tamil Nadu.

The backbone of Tamil Nadu tourism industry is heritage that is deep rooted with the lives of the people and their life style. The state is extremely rich in heritage diversity. Events have tremendous potential as regards the development of tourism in Tamil Nadu is concerned. Fairs and festivals all around the year have captivated tourists to the state. Tourism planners attempt to tick up with the cultural organizations for making arrangements at important heritage tourism destinations to organize ethnic shows, cultural evenings, light and sound shows, craft melas, food plazas, etc. Such tourism promotional activities provide utmost enjoyment to the tourists and expose them to the vast and diverse cultural traditions of Tamil Nadu.

2. Review of Literature

The preservation, restoration and refurbishment of historical monuments are truly the need of the hour for Quinn and Richards (2007) posited that "Festival Tourism" is an important element in "event tourism" so much so that the term "festivalization" has been coined to suggest an over – commodification of festivals exploited by tourism and destination marketers. Many a discourse on festival tourism management has attempted nuanced approaches to differentiate between tourists and festival goers.

Iatazaz Hussain in his article "Impacts of Cultural Events on Tourism in Finland" provides how cultural events helps to promote and enhance the destination and also he highlighted that in order to develop a particular destination, it is necessary to promote its cultural and heritage in a more positive and effective way.

From a tourism point of view, festivals clearly require audiences. As Fanlknor, Chalip, Brown, Jago, Masch and Woodside (2000) argue, the destination branding and development endangered by a festival in largely driven by the strength of attendance it is expected to 'pull'. Jo Mackellar (2013), in his book "Event Audiences and Expectations" highlighted that the fields of leisure, recreation and tourism are the major fields of study which contributed to an understanding of event audiences.

This above literature review clearly indicates that events are first and foremost tourist attraction and plays a vital role in highlighting the heritage expressions of the destinations.

3. Objectives of the Study

To study the cultural and heritage values of festivals and events that highlights the heritage manifestations of Tamil Nadu, how it play a role in the protection and maintenance of heritage symbols of Tamil Nadu and the linkages between events and heritage monuments of Tamil Nadu.

4. Methodology

The present study ascertains the event tourism potential of Tamil Nadu and analyses the trends and strategies of festival tourism promotion in the path of Heritage tourism in Tamil Nadu. Case study review method and field observation method were adopted to draw inferences and implications. The analytical output of such data that is extensively useful and substantiates the work is presented and interpreted.

5. Tamil Nadu Tourism – An Overview

Tamil Nadu is a state in the south-eastern part of the Indian Peninsula. One of the four Dravidian states of India, it has had more than 4,000 years of continuous cultural history. Tamil Nadu has some of the most remarkable temple architecture in the country, and a living tradition of music, dance, folk arts and fine arts. Tamil Nadu is well renowned for its temple towns and heritage sites, hill stations, waterfalls, national parks, local cuisine and the fabulous wildlife and scenic beauty.

6. Linkage of Events And Heritage Tourism in Tamilnadu

In Tamil Nadu, events are the most potent cultural expressions of the people that reflect their ecstatic spirit, rituals, customs, beliefs, and traditional outlook. Festivals of Tamil Nadu can be regarded as the most important physical aspect of cultural tourism. This is because festivals are idealistic avenues for the tourists and host communities to come together, interact and get to know about the culture of each other at a deeper level. Tamil Nadu is a land with a plethora of indoor and outdoor events at various scales. The list of events being promoted with the active support of the Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu and the tourism intermediaries are given in Table-1.

Table-1,Event Tourism Attractions of Tamil Nadu

Sl. No.	Event Based Attractions	Heritage Destinations	Time
1.	Indian Dance Festival	Mamallapuram, Chidambaram	December & January
2.	National Tourism & Cultural Festival	Kanniyakumari	January
3.	National Pilgrim Festival	Rameswaram	January and February
4.	Pongal Tourist Festival	All over Tamil Nadu	January
5.	Chithirai Festival	Madurai	May
6.	Tea and Tourism Festival	Udhagamandalam	April
7.	Kattabomman Vizha	Panchalankurichi	May
8.	Salangai Natham and Bhagavatha Mela	Thanjavur	May
9.	Summer Festival (Flower Shows)	Udhagamandalam, Kodaikanal, Yercaud, Elagiri	May
10.	Kandhoori Festival	Nagore	May
11.	Saral Thiruvizha,	Courtallam	July
12.	Thyagaraja Music festival	Thiruvaiyaru	January and February

Source: Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2008-2009

These events propelled the idea of mooted Event tourism as a niche tourism form in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has much to offer by way of events and in this regard the destination branding strategies need to link events with tourism by highlighting the events as the mainstay of tourism marketing with an integrated approach.



Thus, the positioning of Tamil Nadu as the land of Event Tourism will translate into national benefits of interface with heritage, history, rites, rituals, folklore, and hospitable people. There is always the prospect of rejuvenation as events are dynamic in terms of creativity. The event/festival tourist influx to the monuments at Mamallapuram, Brihadeeswarar Temple, Airateswara temple, Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and many other monuments and sites catches the attention of promoters and destination planners. Furthermore, when tourists flock to witness the events organized in the precincts of the priceless monuments, more incentives come from the stakeholder's side resulting in their effective participation for protection and preservation of the heritage manifests. The tour operators too would want to figure more itineraries involving heritage packages clubbing them with the seasons of events. The composite heritage symbols are the hallmark of Tamil Nadu tradition and the catholicity of the events celebrated there will essentially strengthen the quality of assimilation and offer a life time experience to tourists.

7. Case Studies of Events in Heritage Tourism Sites of Tamil Nadu

With respect to destination marketing, Tamil Nadu Tourism has launched innovative ideas involving several events. The festive season in winter commences with Indian Dance festival and ends with Thiyagaraja Music festival, i.e., a series of mind boggling cultural festivals, - a treat for tourists. TTDC has initiated a package for the Mamallapuram Dance Festival at Mamallapuram and other festivals. Tour Operators views that TTDC can float event tourism to entice tourists from neighbouring States to visit the heritage expressions in the Golden Triangle region configuring Chennai, Mamallapuram, and Kanchipuram.

Case Study 1: Mamallapuram and Chidambaram Dance Festival

Mamallapuram Dance festival conducted by the Department of Tourism is generally held at Mamallapuram during December/January where monolithic rock sculptures of the Pallava Kings are built on the shore. The dances are held on an open-air stage near these sculptures. It is a spectacular dance festival in a beautiful surrounding that brings everlasting joy to the on-lookers. The classical dances of various states are performed by renowned artistes is cherished as an ecstatic artistic delight, and the performances take the audience to a different world. Folk dances also form part of the festivals.

The Natyanjali Dance Festivals is one of the most popular dance festivals of south India, a joint venture of the Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and the Natyanjali Trust, Chidambaram. Natyanjali is regarded as the '**festival of festivals**' in the classical dance world and among the classical dance performers. The Natyanjali Dance Festivals, started in the year 1981 is organized between February and March every year. This like every other religious festival of India is celebrated with immense enthusiasm and passion.

Case Study 2: Chitrai Festival, Madurai

Portuguese missionaries had noticed the various Hindu festivals such as social, domestic and private which were the most attractive part of life in Tamil country. Fr. Antonio Dias gives a vivid picture of the Chitrai festival celebrated in the town of Madurai. It is noted for Meenakshi temple, the most famous in South India dedicated to Goddess Meenakshi. Still one feels surprised to find that the district has 486 temples. Madurai is popularly known as the city of festivals. In the district totally 302 festivals are celebrated annually. The Chitrai festival occurs in Chitrai (April-May) when the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar is celebrated and this wedding festival is also linked with Alagar festival, that is, (Meenakshi's brother) Alagar's unsuccessful journey to bring wedding gifts to his sister before her marriage. The Teppakulam festival takes place in Tai (January-February) when the idols of God Sundareswara and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on a raft round the Teppakulam (Tank) which will be lit with thousands of lights for the occasion. The avanimoolam festival in Avani (August – September) commemorates the various miracles performed by Lord Siva. The chithrai festival gives a great opportunity to the tourist to experience local life in Madurai and to see a traditional Hindu wedding ritual. It attracts huge crowds of people, who flock to Madurai from surrounding areas. The festival is celebrated with a great deal of excitement and hype with the enthusiasm of a real wedding. The celebrations extend all over the city and the streets are flooded with devotees.

Case Study 3: Annual Tea and Tourism Festival at Ooty

The annual Tea and Tourism Festival is celebrated in the Nilgiris jointly by the Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu and Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in January/February. It was introduced in 1992 with the objective of promoting tourism through tea and tea through tourism and boosting Nilgiri Tea industry and tourism sectors. It has over the years become a major socio-economic activity. Dance, music and other cultural programmes are a part of the festive activities along with promotion schemes for tea planters as well as tourists. It attracts crowd in huge numbers, during this festival, and tea lovers from all over the world converge. Visitors can visit tea gardens, factories, and taste and purchase varieties of tea, along with other fun and celebration activities.

8. Swot Analysis of Event Tourism in Tamil Nadu

Table 2

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairs and festivals all around the year • Land of diversity and a great potential to attract foreign as well as domestic tourists. • Well connected with all major cities of India as well as abroad. • Rich cultural diversity in the form of language, traditions, customs, music, dance, art and craft. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality and quantity of the various facilities and services • Limited availability of tourist information • Less marketing, Cleanliness, and safety and security • Most of the destinations are connected with road transport only, which is a major drawback for attracting foreign tourists as well as tourists with high profile.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are increasingly attracted towards tourism events. • Branding strategies • Aggressive marketing over Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security, Safety and health situation. • Failing to involve communities in the decision-making process for tourism development. • Failure to adopt and implement sustainable development and management principles and practices at tourism sites. • Tour operators providing cheap services to travel outside India are also threat for tourist places.

9. Findings And Suggestions

1. Event Tourism is undoubtedly a 'brand asset' for Tamil Nadu Tourism. The co – ordination between heritage and tourism in the settings of events in Tamil Nadu should be comprehended for effective brand campaign.
2. Tamil Nadu has a very loyal tourist base with a high percentage of repeat visitors owing to the calendar of events organized in its premier heritage sites.
3. Event tourism is giving Heritage tourism in Tamil Nadu an apparent identity.
4. The 'content of experiencing' as regards event tourism in Tamil Nadu is outstanding.
5. The myths and symbols of events linked to the heritage monuments are amazing spectacles.
6. Emerging event tourist markets are identified and developed.
7. Sustainable planning mechanisms are not introduced in many event tourism centre of Tamil Nadu.
8. This paper demonstrates that successful promotion depends on effective segmentation.
9. The aesthetics of heritage events are not properly communicated to tourists
10. Commoditization of heritage events must be prevented.
11. Crucial to the success of event tourism branding in Heritage centres of Tamil Nadu is the pro – active initiatives and patronization efforts of both Central and State Governments.
12. An Event Tourism Policy as regards to heritage of Tamil Nadu may be envisaged in future.
13. Overcrowding, congestion, and safety problems need to be addressed.
14. Events of Tamil Nadu must entail public display, thus creating interest and attracting attention as they invigorate and elevate destinations.
15. Regional Development plans can be introduced by way of event tourism promotion.

10. Conclusion

The events of Tamil Nadu play a crucial role in positioning the State as a premier heritage tourism destination. Its success in attracting global and national audiences to UNESCO heritage sites in Tamil Nadu has become an eye – opener for destination planners to devise appropriate branding strategies. The pull attributes of the events are so strong as to attract repeat visitation to the heritage centres. Modification of the brand image of Tamil Nadu Tourism by incorporating the brand values of events for glorifying the heritage symbols can fetch great rewards. The constraints that play spoilsport such as inadequate tourist amenities, safety issues, lack of sustainable planning, etc, can be mitigated by enhancing human resources, green certifications, Public Private Participation Policy and other apt initiatives and strategic efforts. Cultural exploration, passionate outlook towards heritage events, and feeling of awe and enchantment towards heritage expressions are found to be the principal motivational dimension of heritage tourists to Tamil Nadu as postulated by this work.



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