CIRCUIT TOURISM: A UNIQUE MODEL FOR INDIAN TOURISM

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When a tourist from another country visits a highly popular tourist spot in India, her sightseeing is limited to a maximum of two days. This is because other good sites around the place are not fully developed or promoted equally. The most popular tourist spots have been milked to the point of overkill and it is high time a model is developed which promotes a vibrant industry not around a single site of attraction but around an entire region.

Have you ever been to the Taj ... or ever thought of visiting this 'Monument of Love'? Most likely – yes!

So if you are planning to visit the Taj, what else you would like to see in Agra? ... Agra Fort ... Itimad-ud-daullah ... Fatehpur Sikri ....and may be a guided 'Heritage Walk through the Old City of Agra'.

But do you know that on the other side of the Taj, across the river Yamuna, lies is an ancient village Kachhpura? A walk through this village may be an unforgettable experience - various Mughal era monuments amidst rural setting intertwined with the communities and a stunning view of the Taj!

Kachhpura, with sanjhi art painted at its walls, provides an insight into the local culture and rural life of the region. Tourists can catch the glimpses of traditional lifestyle here. Similarly, just off the Fatehpur Sikri Highway, there is a village Korai whose inhabitants were (not anymore!) the keepers of dancing sloth bears.

What I mean to say is - that even around hugely popular tourist places, there lie a number of attractive, but less known places in rural hinterland. If these places are adequately developed into attractive tourist destinations, it can, at one hand, provide wholesome tourism experience to the visitors and on the other, solve the livelihood issues of communities around these places. For example, tourism can be a boon to the struggling Korai inhabitants, whose main source of income- dancing bears, were taken away by animal rights activists.

It has been seen, when a tourist from another country visits a highly popular tourist spot in India, her sightseeing is limited to a maximum of two days. This is because other good sites around the place are not fully developed or promoted equally. The most popular tourist spots have been milked to the point of overkill and it is high time a model is developed which promotes a vibrant industry not around a single site of attraction but around an entire region.

This model is named as "Circuit Tourism" and the author in this article shows through the example of a single district Thrissur, how this model can create new tourist spots of attraction in hitherto unexplored regions. This can spawn fresh entrepreneurship and employment opportunities leading to investment and economic growth. As the example taken here shows, this model of tourism has the potential to light up the lives of the Other India- be it the rural India with poor incomes or the India of the perennially under-served tribals.

Experiences in Thrissur :

A brief idea of the thought process which germinated in the mind of the author needs to be elucidated to gain clarity on the model's vision.

This author was posted as Assistant Collector, Thrissur in mid-2016. Coming from the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh, the exposure to Kerala till then had been of bare minimum level- coconuts, Onam, literacy, beaches and Mohanlal. Attempts were made to understand the culture of Kerala by watching Malayalam films. The images of Thrissur as depicted in those Malayalam films were that of the annual temple festival named "Thrissur Pooram",

THRISSUR CIRCUIT TOURISM

DISTRICT TOURISM PROMOTION COUNCIL THRISSUR

the piety of the temple of Guruvayur, caparisoned elephants and the perennial flow of the Athirapilly waterfalls.

During the field trips across Thrissur in the initial days of getting posted, realisation set in that the tourism potential of Thrissur is hugely untapped. The typical tourist to Thrissur does the following : Check in at Kochi and soak in the colours and sounds of the metropolis, hire a cab to Thrissur for the next day, visit Guruvayoor and Athirapilly falls, upload "God's own country- Thrissur" pictures on social media and go back to Kochi that very evening. Thrissur is an afterthought for these tourists. This is sheer injustice meted out to the cultural capital of Kerala which has more potential as a tourist hub than what a waterfalls and a temple can provide.

The project implemented in Thrissur aims to help tourists who visit Thrissur explore places beyond the conventional ones. This project also helps the tourist to choose one among different circuits of places based on his/her interest. Thus, six circuits are proposed based on what this author has observed and identified as Thrissur's USPs. These circuits are identified based on colours to attract the tourists' immediate attention.

1. Blue Circuit (Water Circuit):

When the words "Water" and "Kerala" are used in the same sentence, the images of Kovalam sands and Alleppey backwaters come to one's mind. This circuit shows that Thrissur is no less endowed with beautiful water-associated tourist hotspots. The "Blue Circuit" plan envisages a 7 AM

start in Thrissur to arrive in Vazhachal, a pristine waterfall spot , by 8.30am. After spending an hour in Vazhachal, one can move on to Charppa, a seasonal misty waterfall, which is five kilometers away.

The next stop is at Athirappilly falls by 11 AM. Recently, this falls has been immortalized in the blockbuster film "Baahubali". A minimum of two hours can be spent wondering as to how Mother Nature has chosen to bestow all it's love on this place. Lunch will be at Thumpoormuzhi, a river diversion project, around 1.30pm. From there, the circuit moves to Munakkal beach where one can reach at around 4:30 PM. This beach is noteworthy for the reason that one can spot dolphins here. Once these new spots (other than the usual suspects) gain more tourist footfall, it can lead to blooming of employment in these areas. Since almost all these areas are in the tribal belt, the aim is to kickstart entrepreneurship and enterprise among tribal youth through tourism.

2. Brown Circuit (Dam Circuit):

Thrissur is home to the maximum number of dams in Kerala. Dams- the temples of modern India- serve the vital purposes of drinking water and irrigation. Considering the breathtaking views one can get atop these dams and hence the tourism potential, this project proposes an entire Dam circuit across Thrissur. In this circuit, one leaves Thrissur by 8 in the morning to reach Chimmony dam by 9.30am, Peechi dam by 11.30,

WATER TOURISM
BLUE CIRCUIT

THRISSUR
Start at 7.00 am

DOLPHIN BEACH
(Munakkal Beach)
Reaches at 4.30 pm
Two hour halt with
evening refreshment

VAZHACHAL 02
Reaches at 8.30 am
& One hour halt with
Morning refreshment

THUMBURMOZHI
Reaches at 1.30 pm &
Two hours halt with Lunch

CHARPPA 03
Reaches at 10.00 am &
half hour halt

ATHIRAPPILLY
Reaches at 11.00 am
Two hour halt

DAM TOURISM
BROWN CIRCUIT

THRISSUR
Start at 8.00 am

VILANGANKUNNU
Reaches at 5.45 pm
& One hour halt
with evening
refreshment

CHIMMONY DAM 02
Reaches at 9.30 am
& One hour halt

POOMALA DAM
Reaches at 4.00 pm
& One hour halt

PEECHI DAM
Reaches at 11.30 am &
One hour halt

VAZHANI DAM
Reaches at 1.30 pm &
Two hours halt with Lunch

Vazhani dam at 1.30pm. After lunch at Vazhani dam , one can go to Poomala dam. After a 16-kilometer journey from there, the tourists can reach Vilangankunnu, A beautiful hillock . The USP of Vilangankunnu is the views one can get to see from there -verdant paddy fields in one direction, a rapidly urbanizing city in another direction and the seawaters paying obeisance to the setting sun in the third.

3. Yellow Circuit (Cultural Circuit):

Outlook's traveller's guide for Kerala provides a tagline for every town and tourist place of Kerala. For Thrissur, the tagline aptly kept is "Kerala's cultural capital". The Yellow Circuit takes one across the cultural hubs of the district One heads for Kerala Kalamandalam, 32 kilometers away from Thrissur town, by 8 in the morning. Kalamandalam is a major centre for learning the great Performing Arts of India - from

CULTURAL TOURISM
YELLOW CIRCUIT
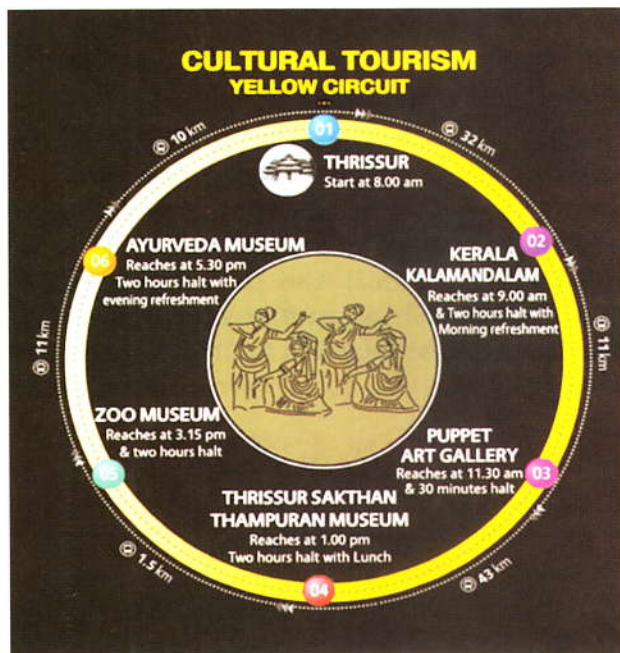
Kathakali to Mohiniyattam to Bharatanatyam. Here, training is also imparted in traditional musical instruments (like Chenda). Thus, a visit to Kalamandalam sensitizes one to kaleidoscopic sights and sounds.

After spending two hours there, the visitors are taken to Puppet Art Gallery by 11.30 am. From there, one moves to Thrissur Shakthan Thampuran Museum,a palace constructed in a hybrid fashion mixing Kerala and Dutch styles and

is situated 43 kilometers away. The afternoon schedule includes the Zoo Museum and the Ayurveda Museum which caps a day well spent in exploring the diverse cultural riches Thrissur has to offer.
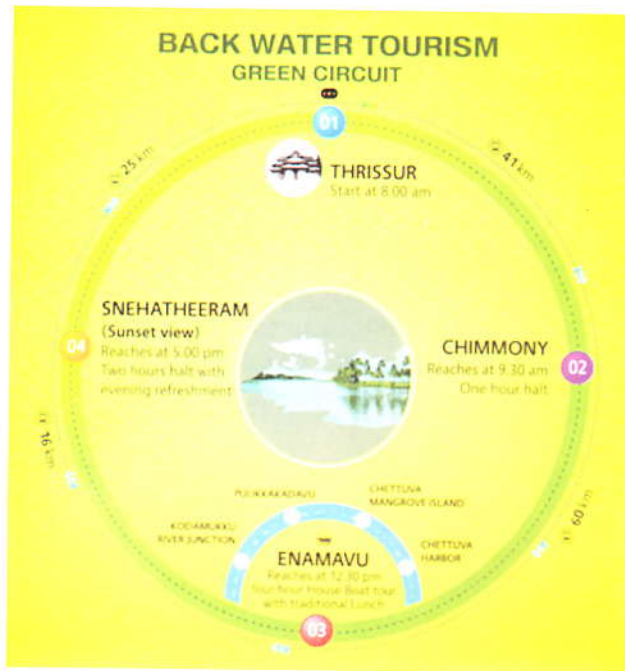
4. Orange Circuit (Heritage Circuit):

This circuit helps a tourist grasp the rich heritage Thrissur has in store. It starts from Thrissur at 8am and one reaches Paravoor. This is home to a famous synagogue thus showing how Kerala is home to a cosmopolitan tradition of accommodating multiple religions. Kottapuram Fort, Paliam Palace, Pattanam Excavation Centre and Museum are also covered in this circuit. The Paliam Palace is a good example of Nalukettu type wherein four halls are joined together with a courtyard at the centre open to the sky.

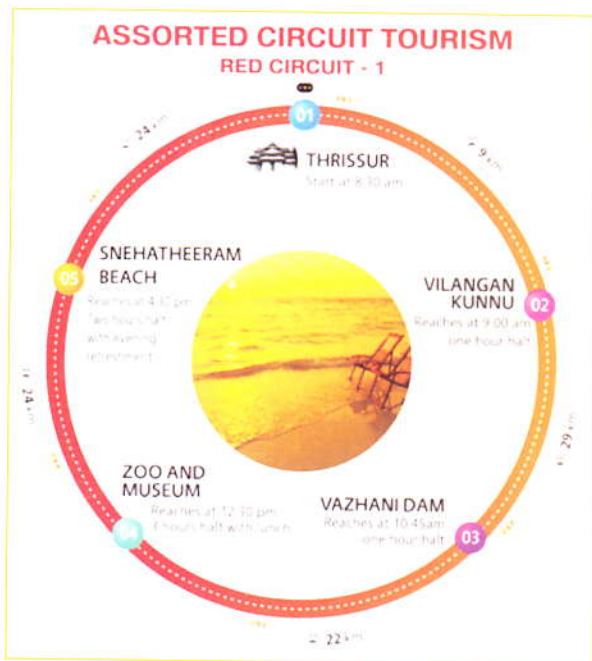
MUZIRIS HERITAGE TOURISM
ORANGE CIRCUIT

5. Green Circuit (Back water Circuit)

The Green Circuit is designed to promote backwater tourism in Thrissur with Chimmony, Enamavu and Snehatheeram beach in focus. Enamavu will be host to a house boat trip providing exquisite local food. The boat will reach Snehatheeram at around 5.30pm before the sunset. The poetically named "Snehatheeram" which means the shore of love is one of the best beach tourist destinations in India ensures that the end to a day well-spent leaves one yearning for more for Thrissur and nature.

BACK WATER TOURISM
GREEN CIRCUIT

THRISSUR
Start at 8.00 am

SNEHATHEERAM
(Sunset view)
Reaches at 5.00 pm
Two hours halt with
evening refreshment

CHIMMONY
Reaches at 9.30 am
One hour halt

ENAMAVU
Reaches at 12.30 pm
Four hour House Boat tour
with traditional Lunch

6. Red Circuit (Assorted Circuit):

The red circuit is designed keeping in mind that a tourist may want to experience Thrissur in it's diverse colors on a single day. There are many such custom-made red circuits. The one shown

ASSORTED CIRCUIT TOURISM
RED CIRCUIT - 1

THRISSUR
Start at 8.30 am

SNEHATHEERAM
BEACH
Reaches at 4.30 pm
Two hours halt
with evening
refreshment

VILANGAN
KUNNU
Reaches at 9.00 am
one hour halt

ZOO AND
MUSEUM
Reaches at 12.30 pm
1 hours halt with lunch

VAZHANI DAM
Reaches at 10.45am
one hour halt

here is an assorted circuit which consists of one place from each theme. The journey begins from Thrissur at 8.30am. Vilangankunnu, Vazhani Dam and Zoo/Museum are coverd, ending the journey at Snehatheeram beach in the evening in time to soak in the sight of a tired Sun bidding adieu to the day.

The working of Circuit Tourism :

Each circuit comprises five to six tourist hotspots and it can be completed in one day. A single brochure enlists all the circuits in a compact manner. Whenever a tourist visits Thrissur and enquires for sightseeing plans in a hotel, he will be provided with these brochures thus allowing him to choose a circuit based upon his taste. This circuit-based tourism is interlinked with hotels, travels' offices and cab drivers associations, among others.

Within six months of this project's launch, the tourists to Thrissur are already enquiring at hotel receptions/travel desks/ cab drivers to take them to one of the circuits instead of a specific place. Almost all hotels in Thrissur now welcomes a tourist with the Circuit Tourism brochures. Tourist operators now have begun to include the circuits in their packages. One minute teasers on each circuit have been developed. A tourist can scan the QR code and watch the teaser before selecting the circuit to experience .A security app is being developed to track the movement of the tourist and compares it with the actual path of the circuit and issue an SOS alert in case of any deviation from the specified circuit path automatically.

The Economics of Circuit Tourism :

One important thread which runs through all these tourist spots is that most of them are located in either rural or tribal belts. Thus, the aims of the project are not only in a tourism perspective but also to promote alternative modes of livelihood for the unemployed youth in the rural areas of Thrissur.

In most of the tourist destinations identified in the circuit ,efforts are in place to include canteen run by a Self Help Group comprising women from the neighborhood. The cleaning and maintenance contracts are given to these Self Help Groups. The local youth have been given priority for any employment opportunities in these destinations.

It has been observed that the number of tourist vehicles coming to these circuits has taken a huge leap in the past few months. This has ,in turn, led to the establishment of new fuel filling stations, repair sheds and service stations in these areas thus resulting in employment of local youth. One important side-effect has been that tourists have begun to stay back in Thrissur rather than travel from Kochi for a day's visit. This has boosted the hospitality sector big time. Domino effect has ensured that there is positive impact on the business of local restaurants, handicrafts and textile stores. Spurt in handicrafts' sales has led to a blossoming of local artisans.

What the Model means for Kerala (and India) :

Kerala provides an unique development model to the entire country. It is sustained by a strong welfare state, remittances from Malayalis abroad and the services sector. The mini- Industrial revolution which transformed Garden Cities to Silicon Valleys in neighbouring states bypassed God's own state. Kerala needs high revenues to finance it's welfare needs - from pensions to healthcare to education.

Since these revenues are not going to be generated from rapid industrialisation, tourism gains huge importance in the Kerala story. Thus, this project outwardly seeks to promote tourism in hitherto unexplored corners of Thrissur but behind it is the vision of running the welfare machinery of the Kerala state itself.

Kerala is the only state in the country which can call itself "God's own country" and escape without much criticism. This is because of how nature has been kind to Kerala and Keralites have been kind to nature. This bountiful potential should not be restricted to the usual spots but should diversify itself so that the world outside can partake more of the state's visual and aural pleasures. This project strives to set a benchmark which can be emulated by districts across the state resulting in a circuit conglomeration catering to tourists from the global community. This model can easily be scaled across the entire nation based on local potential and demand. In addition to all these larger aims, this project also wants to ensure that if at all another Bahubali movie is made, it should feature the hitherto unknown falls of Thrissur rather than the usual Athirapilly falls.

(The author is an IAS officer of Kerala cadre. He is doing pioneering work to promote tourism in Thrissur. His model of Circuit Tourism is being replicated in many other states. Email: mvrkteja@ gmail.com)

Smart India Hackathon 2018

Working towards the PM's vision of a Digital India, MHRD, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Inter Institutional Inclusive Innovation Center (i4C), and Persistent Systems had organized Smart India Hackathon 2017, a unique initiative to identify new and disruptive digital technology innovations for solving the challenges faced by our country. The initiative was a huge success.

To reiterate the efforts, now the second edition of this initiative - Smart India Hackathon 2018 is proposed.

Smart India Hackathon 2018 will have 2 sub-editions – Software as well as Hardware:

- **Software Edition** will be 36 hour software product development competition, similar in concept to Smart India Hackathon 2017

- The new **Hardware Edition** will be a hackathon where teams will be work for 5 straight days and build their hardware solutions. This competition would be limited to only 5 nodal centers with 20-25 teams each.

Participate here- https://innovate.mygov.in/sih2018/

Last date of submission is 15th December, 2017