

The Strands of Sustainability in Island Tourism Development: St. Mary's Island

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ABSTRACT

Globally, island tourism has made a stark presence as a form of special interest tourism. Consequently, the principles of sustainable development are oft discussed in consonance with the nuanced approaches involved in the progression of tourism in the island tourism havens. At times, it is observed that tourism promotion in islands is a tight rope walk as the spots are highly fragile and regarded as the hotspots of invaluable flora and fauna. Thus, conservation through the ideals of sustainable tourism and the forays of development are at loggerheads in the island destinations. This paper analyses the developmental impacts of tourism on the island resources of St. Mary's Island located in Udipi district of Karnataka. Tourism is one of the mainstays of Udipi. It is a coastal town with carefully carved temples, architecturally splendid buildings, laidback beaches and unexplored forests, surrounded by the Arabian Sea on one side and the Western Ghats on the other. The renowned pilgrim center is the most important city in Karnataka after Bangalore and Mangalore. Malpe beach in Udipi is a spectacular attraction popular among both locals and tourists. There are four rocky islands which are close to the mainland of Malpe beach among which St. Mary's island is the most enamouring. The Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of St. Mary's Island is that it has a niche image as "island having a basaltic rock formation in hexagonal form". The present study examines the attributes that facilitate sustainable tourism development in the island destination. This study also assesses the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders of tourism in the island. Data have been collected from the tourists and service providers by adopting the interview method. The gap, if any in terms of tourists' expectations and ecologically sound outcomes shall be brought to light in this study.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Tourism in St. Mary's Island, Conservation, Resources, Flora and Fauna

1. INTRODUCTION

St. Mary's Islands, also known as Coconut Island and Thonsepar, are a set of four small islands in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Malpe in Udipi, Karnataka, India. They are known for their distinctive geological formation of columnar basaltic lava. Scientific studies indicate that the basalt of the St. Mary's Islands was formed by sub-aerial sub volcanic activity, because at that time Madagascar was attached to India. The rifting of Madagascar took place around 88 million years ago. The islands form one of the four geological monuments in Karnataka state, one of the 26 Geological Monuments of India declared by the Geological Survey of India in 2001. The monument is considered an important site for "Geo Tourism".

It is believed that the surreal and beautiful St. Mary's Island was the first bit of land that the famous explorer Vasco Da Gama set foot on when he first arrived in India. This tiny stretch of land seems to have broken away from Malpe Beach's shore in Udupi District and traveled a short distance of six kilometers where it floats freely in the Arabian Sea. The only way to reach St. Mary's Island is by taking one of the frequent ferries that ply to and from Malpe Beach. This Island would be especially intriguing for geologists and historians. Its dark and tall rock columns are interspersed with crystal clear blue water that washes up fine, white sand. The island is truly paradise, in the right season. If visiting St. Mary's Island in the monsoon or after it, tourists are more likely to be disappointed. The sea is pushed into turbulence by strong undercurrents that throw up plenty of unrecognizable objects from the ocean's bed. The choppy water is also murky and not safe for swimming. However, St. Mary's in the summer is a different story altogether. Once off the ferry, then set out to discover this island. It is so small and people can walk around its entirety within twenty minutes, maybe even less.

As a tourist approach this island, the view from the ferry is of a short row of palm trees swaying in the ocean breeze. The one-of-a-kind geological patterns formed by basaltic lava from millions of years ago are a sight to reckon with. At certain places, the rocks can be jagged and protrude over the sea; in others, they continue in what are known as 'straights'. Most spectacular, however, is the spot at the island where the rock has taken the shape of handsome, hexagonal columns that put on a brave front against the vast and endless blue of the ocean.

The sunset from St. Mary's is jaw dropping. The only obstacle to experiencing its magic is that the last ferry back to mainland is at 6pm and overnight camping on the island is strictly not allowed. It is not uncommon to spot pods of dolphins playfully emerging in and out of the deep waters around the island. Especially while in the ferry, watch out for these adorable fish. Between private boats and government ferries, there is a good choice of transport to and from the island. However, the island lies in disorder and is not well cared for by the authorities. The tourists, too, treat it with utmost disrespect. So, when people are here make sure to collect their trash and use the bins. With regard to food, apart from temporary stalls of munchies and snacks, there isn't any place on the island where a substantial meal has. Lose our self to sands littered with sea shells, sub-volcanic rocks formed nearly a billion years ago and clear, blue waves that lap up this small island's shores.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Colonies of gulls, Scolopacidae (sandpipers) and a few crows have been sighted on the Islands. But on the approach to the Islands from the Malpe beach, brahminy kites (*Haliastur indus*), great white egrets, grey egrets (breeding plumage) and groups of large green bee-eaters have been recorded.

The Islands are bereft of buildings, fences, shops. There are no domestic animals either. There are only covered pavilions with park benches on the shore and further inland. Visitors can wander around freely and enjoy the hexagonal formations from vantage locations. Visitors have to carry drinking water and sun screens since the climate is usually hot. Since the last few yards of the approach to the island involves wading, it may be preferable to avoid wearing sneakers.

The only way of getting to the islands is by boat. Regular ferry service ply the 6 km distance from the Malpe fishing harbor and a ship building yard to the islands. However, the frequency of these boats may vary depending on the number of tourists visiting. It is 58 km (36.0 mi) to the North of Mangalore, the coastal city of Karnataka, which is also the nearest airport.

As a tourist potential destination, these Islands have to be conducting a study to improvement and up keeping of the sustainable tourism development through the effective evaluative study .

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable Tourism stems from sustainable development, a term which has become increasingly common in our society since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. Sustainable Development can be defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’ (Brundtland Report, 1997). Sustainable Tourism is tourism that ‘meets the needs of the present visitors and host regions, while protecting and enhancing the natural environment for future generations.’ (WTO, 2009) Sustainable tourism strives to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing and/or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment. By balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination, tourism development can flourish sustainably.

THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

The Giant's Causeway is an area of about 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, the result of an ancient volcanic eruption. It is also known as Clochán an Aifir or tha Giant's Causey in Ulster-Scots. It is located in County Antrim on the northeast coast of Northern Ireland, about three miles (4.8 km) northeast of the town of Bushmills. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986, and a national nature reserve in 1987 by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. In a 2005 poll of Radio Times readers, the Giant's Causeway was named as the fourth greatest natural wonder in the United Kingdom. The tops of the columns form stepping stones that lead from the cliff foot and disappear under the sea. Most of the columns are hexagonal, although there are also some with four, five, seven or eight sides. The tallest are about 12 metres (39 ft) high, and the solidified lava in the cliffs is 28 metres (92 ft) thick in places.

Much of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site is today owned and managed by the National Trust and it is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Northern Ireland. The remainder of the site is owned by the Crown Estate and a number of private landowners.

2. OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the level of tourist facilities and attributes in St. Mary's Islands.
- To suggest possible tourist destination attributes to develop this destination with the view of sustainable development model.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted in a case study model and collected data from direct interview method by interviewing Tourists, facilities providers and Government officials to authorized and control the Island. Present study focused to comparing with one developed international destination has common or uniqueness in terms of tourism attractive resources. Giant Causeway Island in Northern Ireland is lighting to give possible suggestive destination development model

to lead this research. A systematic SWOT analysis method is implemented to get clear picture of problem and good angle view to entire the case.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis is a study suitable to small case studies; it helps to give a good picture with qualitative data and facts. It is an analysis to finding Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats by observation or qualitative information of the particular place, firm or any kind. In this study the data or facts are mentioned in the small or short descriptions or bullet points by categorizing under each title. For this case we have given SWOT analysis of two destinations for tourism and destination management with sustainable approaches. The two destinations are; The Giant Causeway Island of Northern Ireland and another one is St. Mary’s island.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF GIANT CAUSEWAY

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scenery ➤ Conservation Areas ➤ Cultural Heritage ➤ Road Networks ➤ Link Golf Courses ➤ Marine Infrastructure ➤ Self-Catering Accommodation ➤ Visitor and environmental Management System ➤ Visitors Awareness about Environment ➤ The host Population ➤ Welcome host programme participation ➤ Interested Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited Opportunities to eat out ➤ Signage/Routing from access point ➤ Limited promotion of public transport ➤ Absence of Retail shops ➤ No Peak day or congestion planning ➤ Lack of Tourism ethos ➤ Lack of knowledge of competitor products ➤ Limited language skills in relation to overseas visitors ➤ Limited marketing skills and other attraction providers ➤ Short length of stay ➤ Lack of appreciation of tourism as an economic generator
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Private sector interest in providing Tourism services ➤ Government interest in the wellbeing of the area ➤ Supportive local communities ➤ Improved Air access ➤ Growing awareness of Unique natural resource protection ➤ Railway to play arole in moving visitors to and from the causeway ➤ Involvement of Tourism Training Trust ➤ Local college and University research capacity ➤ Opportunity to build on training to craft workers ➤ Continued interest in Ireland from overseas visitors ➤ Improved website and E-commerce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Over development of the coastline ➤ Continued political uncertainty ➤ Competing destination based on accessibility ➤ Threat to build heritage ➤ Need long term funding from visitors and environmental management considerations within tourism planning ➤ Falling behind international standards of welcome and service ➤ Complacency about current quality and competitiveness of the product ➤ Appeal and state of development of competitor destinations, particularly for activities

TABLE NO 1

SWOT ANALYSIS OF ST. MARY’S ISLAND

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scenery ➤ Conservation Areas ➤ Geological Importance ➤ Sea ways ➤ Marine Infrastructure ➤ Self-Catering ➤ Visitors demand ➤ Availability of Unique natural resource in the country ➤ Dominant role of Transport Intermediaries ➤ Connectivity from Major cities ➤ Availability of adjacent attractions nearby ➤ Basic refreshment facilities ➤ Presence of Coconut trees and sea wind ➤ Presence of varied sea shells ➤ Dolphin diving views to visitors ➤ Natural Hut and side benches to take relaxation ➤ Absence of Entrance fee or entry permit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of knowledge of Tourism potential ➤ Limited language skills in relation to overseas visitors ➤ Limited marketing skills and other attraction providers ➤ Short length of stay ➤ Lack of appreciation of tourism as an economic generator ➤ Unsustainable practices were not controlled ➤ Conservation of natural resources were absent ➤ Absence of protecting the Historical heritage ➤ Security measures of tourists were very less ➤ Tourist activities and recreation options were absent ➤ Tourism infrastructure were not planned properly ➤ For Tourism development, stake holders were not involved properly.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Growing awareness of Unique natural resource protection ➤ To create official website ➤ Private sector interest in providing Tourism services ➤ Government interest in the wellbeing of the area ➤ Supportive local communities ➤ To implement Water sports activities ➤ To aware host people about Importance of the natural resources ➤ To implement sustainable tourism framework ➤ Conservational approach and sustainable tourism revenue approaches should be initiated ➤ Focusing to improve the facilities and amenities with competitive standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Competing destination nearby with more Attraction ➤ Threat to build heritage ➤ Need long term funding from visitors and environmental management considerations within tourism planning ➤ Irresponsible attitude of authorities to international standards of welcome and service for Tourism ➤ Complacency about current quality and competitiveness of the product ➤ Appeal and state of development of competitor destinations, particularly for activities ➤ Pollution happened to existing unsustainable tourism activities ➤ Restrictive approach of Geological Survey of India towards Legal Tourism development framework

TABLE NO 2

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The comparative study results to certain facts to improve the destinations, by comparing Giant Causeway with St. Mary's Island; St. Mary's Island requires more improvement to develop sustainable tourism in this area. Government authorities irresponsible attitudes and denying attitudes are existing hurdles to develop tourism in this area, the model of Giant Causeway is applicable in this Island, tourism employability, Natural resource conservation models, sustainable development and up keeping, Tourist safety and security measures, other tourism attributes and activities etc. have to implement to grow and develop this island. Then only the positive tourism economic benefits and ripple effects will actively happen in the host community of the St. Mary's Island and surroundings.

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