

A Study on Tourism Potential in Munnar Region, Kerala

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ABSTRACT: Tourism is considered as one of the fast growing industry in the world. It generates employment and enhances the standard of living of the local people. Kerala, with its rich natural scenic beauty, climatic and ecological resources shares significant number of tourist visiting to India. Munnar is one of the important tourist spot of Kerala. With its natural scenic beauty, wild life sanctuary and the pleasant climate attracts both domestic and foreign tourists every year. Mattupatty, Marayoor, Anaimudi, Pallivasal, Thekkady are the important tourist centers and has vast potential for tourism development. The present paper analysis the important tourist centres and infra-structure facility available in Munnar to promote tourism.

KEYWORDS: Tourism potential, Promotion, Perception.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concern on tourism and development has got significance at global, national and local levels. It provides employment opportunities to the local people and services to the tourist. It brings the world close to each other through their transformation of economic activities. The study area Munnar possesses a vast potential and requires greater attention from government and as well as the public to develop and promote tourism. Cohen E. (2003) the definition for tourism as laid down by WTO and UNSTAT (1994) is that "Tourism is the activities of the persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes." Halls and Wheeler (1992) noted a trend arising due to socio demographic changes and a higher spending power, inducing a change in the tourist values.

II. STUDY AREA

The study area Munnar is located in Idukki district of Kerala state. It is a highland region situated in Western Ghats; consist of Munnar Panchayat and its surroundings. It is bounded by Pallivasal in the south, Marayoor Village in the north, Mankulam Village in the west and Vattavada and Chinnakanal village in the east. It extends from 10°1'36" North to 10°19'45" North latitude and 76°53'23" East to 77°15'34" East longitude. It covers an area of 478 sq.km and has total population of 55753 as per Census 2011. Munnar is connected with centers of Kerala and other parts of India only through roadways. (Fig.1)

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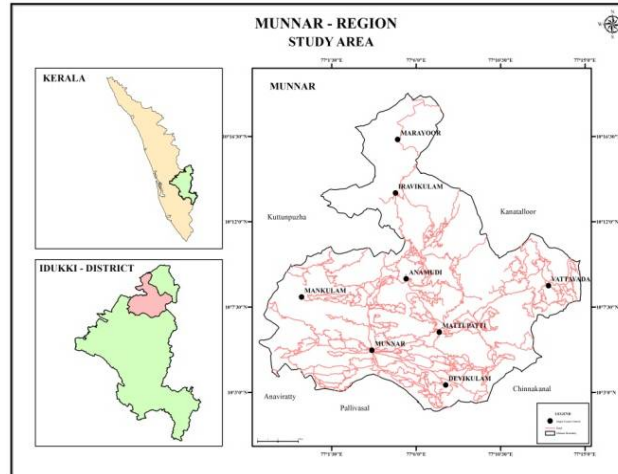


Fig. 1 Study Area

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are

1. To identify the tourist spots in Munnar region.
2. To assess the tourism potential and infra-structural facilities in Munnar region.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data source. The secondary data on information such as tourist arrivals and the basic amenities available in the study area have been collected from the Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Kerala and Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Panchayat Statistic Records. The collected information were processed and analyzed by using simple statistical methods. Tables and diagrams and maps have been prepared to show the location of the tourist areas and all other related information to understand the existing conditions of tourism in Munnar.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. MAJOR TOURIST CENTRES IN MUNNAR REGION

Munnar is an important tourist destination of Kerala state. Its picturesque hills, natural scenic beauty, historical heritage place, diverse fauna and flora attract large number of tourist from all over the world. Munnar has great potential for tourism development. The important tourist spots of Mattupetty lake and dam, Rajamala, Eco point, Top station, Devikulam, Marayoor sandal forest with ancient caves and waterfalls, Blossoms International park, Anamudi, Pallivasal, Attukkad, Nyayamkad, Cheeyappara and Valara waterfalls, Thekkady and Vagamon of neighboring tourist spots are considered the best choice of tourist spots in Munnar region. (Fig.2)

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The Munnar region has immense potential for the development of tourism. It offers most astonishing natural untapped areas, wildlife and bird sanctuaries, gardens, lakes, waterfalls and old cultural centres etc. These areas have high potential to develop as further destinations for future promotion of tourism in this region. It will earn more income and improve the standard of living of the local people. For further promotions and development of tourism centers in Munnar, the assessment of basic infra-structure facilities available in Munnar region is essential.

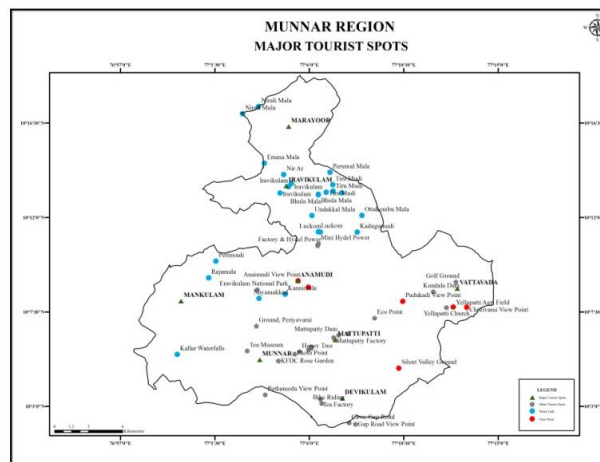


Fig 2. Major Tourist Spots

The greenish heaven awaits the tourist, like a virgin land untouched by artificial creations. These beautiful hills and valleys are rightly called as the Kashmir of South India. Aluva is the nearest railway station. From the International Airport at Nedumbassery, Munnar can be reached by road in three hours. Those who come from various places in Kerala (except from Palakkad) can find it easy to reach Munnar through Kothamangalam-Adimaly-Munnar route. Those from Palakkad can select the Pollachi-Udumalpettai-Marayoor-Munnar route. Without having an arranged spot with lot of artificial additions like theme parks, concrete creations etc., its natural beauty will really make Munnar a memorable and invaluable place. Munnar remains as a green paradise of nature lovers with lots of natural attractions.

The major tourist centers in Munnar were grouped into four tourist circuits. They are:

- 1) Munnar - Mattupetty Dam - Indo Swiss Livestock Project - Echo Point - Kundala Dam - Top Station (34 kms).
- 2) Munnar - Pothamedu - Chitrapuram - Pallivasal - Cheeyappara - Adimali - Valara (40 kms).
- 3) Munnar - Rajamala - Marayoor - Chinnar (70 kms).
- 4) Munnar - Devikulam - Lock Heart Gap - Power House Waterfalls - Anayirankal (32 kms).

1) Munnar - Mattupetty Dam - Indo-Swiss Livestock Project – Echo Point - Kundala Dam - Top Station Circuit (34 kms). The tourist spots located in this route are discussed as follows:

- **Mattupetty Dam** – Mattupetty dam is located ten kilometer away from Munnar town along Munnar and Top Station road. It is a very beautiful picnic spot. It has been built in connection with the Pallivasal Hydro Electric Project. The dam lake spreads over 8 sq.km through the wild. Idukki District Tourism Promotion Council has made arrangements for boating in the dam lake. Elephant riding and horse riding are conducted in the roadside of the Mattupetty dam by private people.
- **Indo-Swiss Livestock Project** - The Indo-Swiss Livestock Research Project Centre, a highly specialized dairy farm is yet another attraction to tourist. The Government of Switzerland set up a Cattle Development and Research Centre at Munnar. The Indo Swiss Project is located at the middle of vast grasslands which stretches for miles like a carpet made of emerald. A very beautiful garden also developed near the cattle farm. Rare species of roses, season flowers dahlias, zinnias etc are really eye catching in this garden.
- **Eco Point** - Eco point is located only three kilometers away from the Indo Swiss Project Center. From the roadside, if you howl northward against the reservoir nature will answer with an eco. If you make the howling by standing beside the reservoir, louder and clearer will be the eco. Quite strange is this natural response to a human call. People used to regularly to hear their voice through nature. Such a things is not known anywhere else in Kerala.

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- **Kundala Arch Dam** - Kundala Arch Dam - the Asia's first Arch Dam is found 7 kms away from the Echo Point. Located in the midst of a dense forest, Kundala dam and its surroundings offer a calm and quiet atmosphere with quite natural beauty, untouched by artificial developments. Beautiful Kashmiri shikkara boats and pedal boats as well as row boats are available on rent. Boating in the dam is an experience beyond words. The Kerala State Electricity Board provides boating facilities for the tourist in the dam.
- **Golf – Course Ground** - Golf course ground to play golf is found only eight kilometers from Kundala Dam, through Chittuvvara Estate road. Golf Club is functioning there even now under the Tata company and allow the tourists to play golf during their visit. This vast grassland provides with a serene atmosphere for the tourist.
- **Top Station** - It is a very lofty place where Kerala is separated from Tamil Nadu. Top station, the border of the two states is located 10 kms away from Kundala Dam. The beautiful landscape of Tamil Nadu can be seen from here. The top station would be a misty peak during most of the afternoons. Kodaikkanal, an important tourist spot in Tamil Nadu is just 61 kms away from Top Station, but as the road goes through dense forests with dangerous turns and bends, the journey may be hazardous.

2) Munnar - Pothamedu - Chithirapuram - Pallivasal - Cheeyappara - Adimali – Valara Circuit. These routes includes Blossoms International park, Kothamedu view point, Pallivasal, Attakadu, Cheeyappara and Valara waterfalls

- **Blossoms International Park** - The Blossoms International Park, located near the tunnel face of the Pallivasal Hydro Electric Project, is an important place where tourists can enjoy a lot. The park is located by the side of Kochi – Madurai Highway and is just three kilometers away from Munnar Town. It stretches about 16 acres and has beautiful gardens with rare varieties of plants, flowers and shady trees. Water cycling, boating, cycling for kids, roller skating, badminton etc. are also available. The park has tree houses, ropeways, fountains and swings and it attracts large number of tourist from other States.
- **Pothamedu View Point** - Pothamedu is located one kilometer away from the Head works dam junction on the National Highway 49. The surrounding places can be seen clearly in a bird's eye view, if the atmosphere is pleasant and clear. The Idukki Arch Dam which is 60 kms away also can be seen from here. Large number of green cardamom, tea and coffee estates and the Muthirapuzha river are the unforgettable areas in Pothamedu.
- **Chithirapuram** - This tourist spot is located 10 kms away from Munnar. Home of the Pallivasal Hydel-Power Project, this hill town is also famous for its picturesque tea plantations. With its sleepy little cottages, bungalows, old playgrounds and courts, Chithirapuram still exudes an old charm.
- **Pallivasal** - Pallivasal spot is located 8 kms away from Munnar. The unparalleled beauty of nature and the astonishing heights of human achievements meet at the sight of the first hydro- electric project of Kerala here. A visit to this spot is worthwhile to enjoy the natural and manmade attractions.
- **Attukkad Waterfalls** - This is another eye catching tourist spot located 3 km away from Pallivasal. The sight of water falling down steeply creating milky foam is quite spectacular and attracts large tourist during peak summer.
- **Cheeyappara And Valara Waterfalls** - The Cheeyappara and Valara waterfalls are located between Neriamangalam and Adimali on the Kochi-Madurai Highway. The Cheeyappara waterfalls cascade down in seven steps add it is a real feast to the eyes. Valara has a chain of waterfalls, surrounded by thick green forests and attracts more tourists.

3) Munnar - Rajamala - Marayoor - Chinnar (70 kms). This circuit include the important tourist spots of Rajamala, Eravikulam National park, Chinnar Wildlife sanctuary, Naimmakad waterfalls, ancient caves, Marayoor and Tea Museum.

- **Tea Museum** - Tea Museum is located one kilometer away from Munnar Town on Munnar-Nallathanny road. Tea museum provides a glimpse of the history of tea plantation in Kerals's high ranges. The museum set up by Tata tea company, a major player in the industry, is located at its Nallathanny estate. Curious photographs and machinery dating back to a century and more, tell a story of progress that has its roots in the adventure and courage of a group of people. The museum takes visitors and provides insights into the phenomenal growth of Munnar and also provides information on the operations involved in processing package tea. The wheel of the rail engine of the Kundale valley light railway, the train used to run between Munnar and Top Station during the early part of last century, a tea roller from 1905, rotor vane, which is an old type of tea processing machine, the 'pelt on wheel' used in the power

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generation plant that existed in the Kannimally estate in the 1920s, Manual calculators, typewriters, telephones and furnitures used during the last century are kept here as a monuments.

- **Naimakkad Waterfalls** - Naimakkad Waterfalls is located 8 kms away from Munnar Town on the Marayoor route. Naimakkad waterfalls are a very beautiful down-pour of clear and chilly water from a peak amidst the dense forest. On sunny days, this waterfall not only makes milky foam but also a beautiful rainbow.
 - **Eravikulam National Park (Rajamalai)** - Eravikulam National Park extends from the Rajamalai junction, which is eight kms away from Munnar on the Munnar–Marayoor road. The Eravikulam National Park covers of an area of 97sq.km, at the peak of Anamudi and its surroundings. Anamudi, being the highest mountain in South India is located here. The whole park is composed of mounts, beautiful meadows and valleys. The park is well known for the rare species of wild goats and the Ibex, i.e. Nilgiri Tahrs and called as "Varaiadu", "Varai" in Tamil means rock. So "Varaiadu" means goat that trek through the rocky surface. Neelakurinji, one of the rarest flowers on earth, having beauty and medicinal importance is plentiful in Rajamalai. These plants bloom only once in 12 years. When they are in flowers, all the mounts of the park will be covered with beautiful blue carpets, a truly memorable attraction in Munnar.
 - **Luckam Waterfalls** - A beautiful waterfall in the wild Nealuckam, a place near the Vagavarai Estate is located at the Munnar - Marayoor road side. From the road just five minutes tramp takes to the chilling and thrilling sight of Luckam waterfalls spot.
 - **Vagavarai** - Vagavarai is famous for the first pepper and orange plantations in Kerala and is also home to the first mini hydel project of the state. It is located 24 kms away from Munnar. The hill slopes (Varai) covered with well-kept tea gardens, seasonally don bright red colours when the Vaga trees (Abhizzia Lebbek) bloom all over the place. Between Chattamunnar check post and the Tata tea factory at Vagavarai, hundreds of these trees bloom simultaneously making up an unforgettable sight for weeks.
 - **Marayoor** - Marayoor is located 42 kms away from Munnar, beside the Munnar - Udumalpet road., On the way to Marayoor, one can come across cardamom as well as tea plantations, orange groves, wild creeks, rare flowers etc. Marayoor is the only place where natural sandalwood forest is seen. Sandalwood forests stretch for a few' kilometers. In the forest, there is a children's park and deer park. A number of rare trees, plants and animals are protected here. A major area of Marayoor is used for cultivating sugar-cane the jaggery produced here is of the highest quality in India. The Pambar river flows through the heart of Marayoor and reaches the Amaravathi Dam in Tamil Nadu.
 - **Muniyara - The Dwelling Caves of the Ancient Tribes** - A number of caves can be seen among the rocky area along the Marayoor-Kanthalloor road. These caves are made of huge rocky planks or slabs. There are different opinions prevailing about these caves. Some are of the opinion that these were the dwelling places of the ancient tribes. Others say that these were holy caves where the ancient sages used to meditate. In Kovilkadavu, on the bank of Pambar there is a temple located in a cave. This temple has been made out of a single rock. On a rock slab near the temple there are some inscriptions which nobody at present can read.
 - **Chinnar Wild Life Sanctuary** - Chinnar wild life sanctuary is located 20 kms from Marayoor along the Munnar - Udumalpet road and bordered with Tamil Nadu. This sanctuary is spread across 90.44 sq.km. Most of the South Indian animals including the grizzled giant squirrel, champal squirrel, elephant, sambar deer, gaur etc. are seen in this sanctuary.
- 4) Munnar – Devikulam Route: (Munnar - Devikulam - Rock Heart Gap - Power House Waterfalls - Anayirankal Dam (32 kms). This routes includes the important places of Munnar, Rock heart gap, waterfalls and dam.
- **Devikulam Lake** - Devikulam Lake lies between the tea gardens and the forests is 3 km away from Munnar. It is believed that the lake got its name as Sita Devi bathed in it when Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were in the forests to obey Dasaradha's order. Presently, this place is under Tata's ownership.
 - **Lock Heart Gap** - It is located 13 kms away from Munnar. The panoramic view of Bison valley and other sleepy little villages thousands of feet below, wrapped in mist most of the time, on one side and steep rocky slopes with abundant wild flowers on the other side, make this stretch of Kochi – Madurai National Highway an unforgettable tourist spot.
 - **Power House Waterfalls** - This spot is enriched with the scenic Western mountain ranges and is 17 kms away from Munnar. This lovely waterfalls, emanates from the legendary 'Sita Devi Kulam' near Devikulam, believed to

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have been the bathing place of 'Sita' wife of 'Rama' of Ramayana (the epic story that works even now as the cultural unifying foundation of several nationalities in South-east Asia). The visitors to the waterfalls believe that the medicinal and curing powers of the water will act as a natural massage and have curing properties.

- **Anayirankal Dam** - Anayirankal Dam is located 24 kms away from Munnar. Sprawling tea gardens, surrounded by evergreen forests on the slopes of high mountain ranges make the Anayirankal Lake and Dam, a very popular picnic spot. Herds of elephants often visit the lake and giving the visitors a rare opportunity of seeing elephants in open place from safe vantage points.

B. INFRA-STRUCTURAL FACILITIES IN MUNNAR

Every centre needs proper infrastructural facilities for development. Most of the visitors to Munnar had come for recreations, site seeing and relaxation. Munnar is often referred as common man's 'Kashmir'. Nonetheless the natural scenic beauty has attracted many tourists. In addition to attractions the availability of accommodation, transport and communication facilities provide better development of tourism in Munnar. Infrastructural facilities in Munnar region includes:

C. ACCOMMODATION

The tourists from distant places wish to stay and spend time need proper accommodation, The accommodation facilities play a vital role not only the present tourist setup but also the future growth of this tourist centre. The different types of accommodation available in Munnar are

- Hotel and Restaurant
- Cottage,
- Guesthouses
- Inspection Bungalows and
- Resorts and tourist homes.

Table 1
Munnar Region – Accommodation Facilities Available

S.No.	Types	Total
1	Hotels & Restaurants	49
2	Cottages	36
3	Guesthouses	2
4	Inspection Bungalows	1
5	Resorts	12
6	Tourist Home	28
7	Lodges	13

Source: Panchayat Statistics, Munnar 2001.

The above Table I gives a clear picture on the accommodation facilities available in Munnar tourist centre. There are 49 hotels and restaurants, 36 cottages, 28 tourist home and 2 guest houses provide tourist to stay and dine. Apart from these there are four forest inspection bungalows also provide rooms to stay in natural environment and to enjoy and appreciate the serene environment.

D. FOOD

Most of the tourist spots are situated ten to twenty kilometers away from the Munnar town. But majority of the hotels and restaurant are located within the town itself. They provide food and shelter for the tourist throughout the year. As the tourists are coming from various parts of the world, in order to fulfill their need, the hoteliers have various types of cuisine. Apart from the above hotels and restaurant there are number of motels and roadside Tiffin stalls also provides fast food, hot and cool drinks.

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Table 2
Munnar Region – Type of Food stalls

S.No.	Type of Food stalls	Total
1	Hotels & Restaurants	68
2	Cottages	36
3	Guesthouses	2
4	Resorts	12
5	Tourist Home	28
6	Tiffin Stall	35
7	Motel	46
8	Tea and Cool drinks	209

Source: Compiled by the Investigator

In Munnar region tea and cool drinks shops are present dominantly having the total number of 209 stalls. In this region nearly 68 hotels and restaurants are found. 36 cottages are present in the Munnar region. Table.2

E. TRANSPORT FACILITIES

Road transport is the only mode of transportation available in Munnar, both for moving goods and passengers. National Highways 49 connects Kochi – Adimali – Munnar – Madurai. Kerala State Road Transport Corporation made bus services to Munnar. It operates nearly 10 buses to cover the entire tourist spots. Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation also operates 16 bus services to Munnar. 6 private bus travel operators also operate number of buses from Munnar to Theni, Madurai, Coimbatore, Palani, Chennai and Bangalore. In total 81 bus services to other centres of Kerala, 23 bus services towards Coimbatore side, 21 bus services towards Theni, 6 bus services towards Kumily and 5 bus services to Bengaluru were operated from Munnar. Table.3

Table 3
Munnar Region – Transport Facilities

S.No.	Type of Transport	Total
1	Buses	26
2	Taxis	525
3	Jeeps	284
4	Tourist Vans	10
5	Auto Rickshaws	1014
6	Private Travels	6

Source: Compiled by the Investigator

In total 136 buses were operated to connect the different spots of Munnar and other centres. Apart from corporation bus services, there are number of private and tourist vehicle operators also provide services to this tourist centres. More than 525 tourist taxies, 284 private tourist jeeps and more than 1000 auto rickshaws are available to provide transport facilities and to meet the requirements of the tourist who visit Munnar.

F. COMMUNICATION FACILITY

The communication also plays an important role in the growth of tourism. There is only one public telephone booth in Munnar post office and 3 internet browsing centers provide communication facilities to the tourists. There are 6 Courier service centres and 1 Postal services are also available for the tourist. Table.4

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Table 4
Munnar region – Communication Facilities 2011

S.No.	Type of Communication	Total
1	Postal Service	4
2	Courier Service	5
3	Internet Browsing centre	3
4	Information Centers	5
5	Telephone Booth	-
6	Mobile Towers	7

Source: Compiled by the Investigator

There is 3 tourist information centers in Munnar, it include District Tourism Development Information Centre, Co-operative Information Centre and one Private Tourists Information centre provides information about the various tourist places in Munnar region.

G. MEDICAL FACILITIES

Kerala is the only place in the world where Ayurvedic, the ancient form of science and holistic system of medicines based on natural is practiced to perfection. The equable climate, natural abundance of forests with a wealth of herbs and medicinal plants and the cool monsoon season are best suitable for Ayurveda treatment in Munnar. Table.5

Table 5
Munnar region – Number of Hospitals 2011

S.No.	Types	Total
1	Hospital	29
2	Ayurveda	6
3	Homeopathy	3
4	Dispensaries	3
5	PHC	2
6	Siddha	5
7	Medical Shops	6

Source: Panchayat Statistics, Munnar

Only 6 medical shops and pharmacies are located in Munnar. The Tata General Hospital provides all modern facilities to the people. There are 36 estate hospitals provides medical facility to the tea estate labourers and also serves the people of the Munnar region.

H. MARKET AND BAZAARS

Munnar is surrounded by thirty six tea estates owned by Tata Tea Ltd. Large quantity of fruits and vegetables are collected in Munnar. Munnar is the only market centre for exchange of goods. All vegetables cultivated in highland areas were transported to nearby markets and neighbouring district of Ernakulam. The fresh vegetable and fruits like carrot, cabbage, beet root, beans, peas, strawberry, tree tomato, fashion fruits etc are sold in the tourist spots. Munnar is main business centre for the large number of tea estates. There are number of provisional stores, textiles and woolen shops, toys centre, jewellery, etc are located along main road in the core of the town. This bazaar attracts large number of tourist with its fresh tea products and spices.

Munnar covered with full of tea garden and spices. This hill station is the main tea producer in South India. The Tata Tea Ltd is the leading tea producer in this region. There are 150 Tea and Spices shops are located in Munnar town, including Tata tea Ltd and sold variety of tea products and spices for the tourists.

I. DRINKING WATER FACILITIES

In total 211 public taps, house taps and others provides drinking water facility to the people of Munnar. About 46 public taps in Munnar town and provides drinking water facility to the local people and also the tourist. Table.6

Table 6

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Munnar region - Drinking Water Facilities

S.No.	Taluk Name	Public Taps	House Taps	Other	Total
1	Munnar	46	181	30	211
2	Marayoor	153	375	6	381
3	Chinnakkanal	8	-	-	-
4	Devikulam	14	49	2	51
5	Kanthalloor	56	-	-	-
6	Bison valley	23	-	-	-
7	Pallivasal	70	63	4	67

Source: Panchayat Statistics, Munnar

Drinking water facilities is provided through pipes for 181 houses and there are 30 private owned drinking water taps were also located in Munnar to meet the demand of the tourists as well as the local people. Since only limited number of drinking water taps were found in Munnar and not sufficient to meet the demand of the tourists and the local people.

J. SANITATION AND SEWAGE FACILITY

There are only limited numbers of toilet and sanitation facility available in Munnar town. There are two public use toilets and 3 pay and use toilets and sanitation were located in Munnar. These are mostly located nearer to the bus stand areas only. Toilet and sanitation facilities are not available in most of the tourists spots in Munnar region.

VI. SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

To promote and develop the tourism in Munnar, the government and local authorities should give the priority to provide the necessary infrastructure and basic amenities at Munnar. Number of good hotels, restaurants and guest houses to be constructed at the interior tourist spots by providing electricity, drinking water, television, internet and other communication facilities. To provide better transport facilities - frequency of buses both by government and private agencies to be increased. Loading and boarding will be provided with reasonable rates. Lastly information centres may be started to provide the detail about tourist destinations and safety of the tourist stay.

To conclude that Munnar with a vast potential places attracts tourist from all over the world. Most of its places are untapped and has lot of scope for development. The existing basic amenities are not sufficient to meet the demand of the tourists. It needs proper infrastructure and basic amenities to promote tourism development in Munnar. About 90% of the tourist opinioned that the provision of basic amenities were important for the promotion and development of tourism in Munnar.

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