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Identification of Tourism Potential of Vagamon (Idukki, Kerala) for Caravan Park

Nijas V. P¹, Arpita Srivastava², Bijay Kumar Das³

B. Arch, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, India¹

M. Arch, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, India²

Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, India³

ABSTRACT: During the 1980s, the country's economic development programmes have placed a significant focus on the development of the tourism industry. The economies of many nations depend heavily on tourism, which has grown to be the most significant event with enormous global notoriety. It has achieved industry status on a global scale. Tourism has a great deal of potential to provide foreign exchange and jobs. A lasting financial boost, as well as advancements and progress for the community (Choudhury et al., 2023). The state of Kerala, which is now referred to as "God's own country" on the global tourism map has also given it a vital role in order to reorient its economic development using its naturally rich environment. Hence, the state encourages the development of tourism in all of its manifestations, such as "beach tourism," "backwater tourism," "village tourism," "ecotourism," "adventure tourism," "monsoon tourism," and "historical tourism," among others. The Vagamon region is rural and mostly made up of tea plantations, pine forests, and meadows. Natural streams in the area are being obstructed, and the abrupt, vast inflow of people driving large and medium-sized vehicles on the silken hills has disturbed the tranquilly and affected the environment as a whole. The built environment of Vagamon uses locally available sustainable materials like clay for tiles and wailings etc. Laterite stones were used for construction and lime mortar is used for plastering. Bamboo and timber remains are other common building materials used. The objective of this paper is to identify the tourism potential for Vagamon (Idukki, Kerala) for Caravan Tourism and managing it in a positive way while evolving sustainable development of the area

KEYWORDS: Caravan Park, Back pack tourist, Nature trail, Adventure Tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

The definition of tourism is "It is the system involving the discretionary travel and temporary stay of persons away from their usual place of residence for one or more nights, excepting tours made for the primary purpose of earning remuneration from points enroute" (Leiper, 1979).

Kerala's service economy is expanding significantly thanks in large part to tourism. The entire amount of income made by tourism in 2015 (through both direct and indirect means) was 26,689.63 crores, an increase of 7.25% from the previous year. The overall amount of tourism-related revenue grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.33 percent over the previous ten years. From 7,738 crores in 2005 to 26,689.63 crores in 2015, it increased. The annual growth rate of tourism-related income between 2005 and 2015 shows a varying trend. The growth rate showed a tendency to decline between 2013 and 2015: from 12.22% in 2013 to 7.25% by 2015 (George, 2019).

The Vagamon region of Kerala's Idukki district is home to a variety of pristine, unaltered natural landscapes. This sparsely populated region, which is part of the Western Ghats and has been designated as a biodiversity "hotspot," is home to a variety of rich indigenous plants and animals (George, 2019).

Backpackers lodging is a shared-room/dormitory establishment with a focus on affordability that welcomes solo travellers usually backpackers or groups for brief stays and offers common areas and community amenities. Although many hostels also provide private rooms, a place must offer brief-term, shared lodging for independent travellers in order to qualify as a hostel. Instead of renting complete rooms like in a hotel or guesthouse, guests independently reserve individual beds in shared rooms under the term "dormitory." (Kaur Tuteja & Sharma, 2019).

Due to the freedom and flexibility it offers when travelling in terms of routes and accommodations, the idea of caravan tourism has become extremely popular all over the world. Vehicles like recreational vehicles (RV), campervans, motor homes, etc. would fall under this category. Caravans are a distinctive kind of tourism that encourages family-friendly travel even in routes and locations lacking sufficient hotel accommodations. Caravans are particularly designed vehicles that are used for transportation, recreation, and lodging. The presence of enough caravan parks in the designated circuits is one of the crucial prerequisites for caravan tourism. An area where caravans can park overnight in designated spots with basic or modern services and facilities is known as a caravan park. (Caravan guidelines: Caravan tourism policy, 2022).

The demand for eco, adventure, wildlife, and pilgrimage tourism is currently rising. This entails travelling to and staying in far-off places like forests, deserts, and riverbanks. There is currently a lack of lodging at popular tourist spots, particularly in outlying regions and occasionally in locations where it might not be possible or legal to build permanent structures. In such a case, Caravan Tourism can successfully supply the rising demand while maintaining compliance with standards of quality and safety. Several market categories, such as young people, families, seniors, and foreign tourists, would be drawn in by caravan tourism (Caravan guidelines: Caravan tourism policy, 2022).

II. CASE STUDIES

A. Backpackers Lodging

Zostel plus Wayanad:

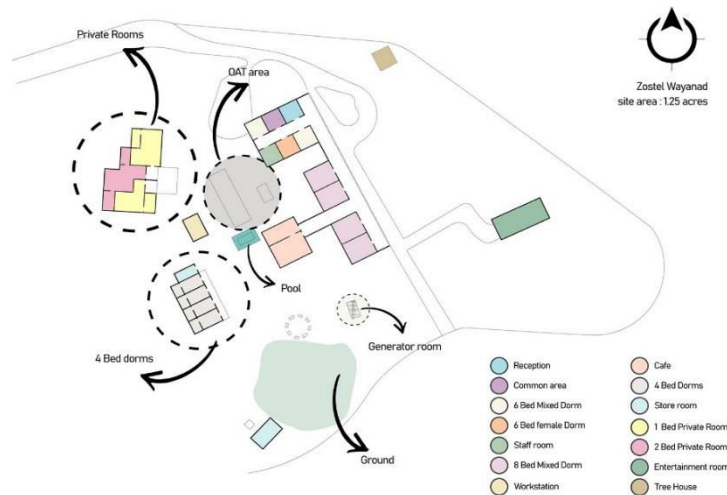


Figure 1 Case study of Zostel plus Wayanad (Backpackers hostel)
Source: Author

Zostel plus Wayanad is Located at the 700 acres of lush green Chembra tea Estate, in Meppadi region of Wayanad District, Kerala. With a site area of 1.25 acres, The Zostel attracts a wide range of travellers.

Design Philosophy: The core function of Zostel is to provide affordable accommodation for budget-minded travellers, typically younger people who are traveling independently or in small groups.

•Zostel offer dormitory-style rooms with shared facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens, and common areas, as well as private rooms.

The Amenities provided by Zostel Includes:

- i. Dormitories: a space with a number of beds that is used for shared sleeping
 - 6 Bed Mixed Dorm(Rs 799/- per bed)
 - 6 Bed Female Dorm (Rs 799/- per bed)

- 8 Bed Mixed Dorm (Rs 699/- per bed)
- 4 Bed Mixed Dorm (RS 849/- per bed)
- Deluxe 4 Bed Mixed Dorm (RS 899/- per bed)

[Rate as on 29 March 2023]

- ii. Private Rooms : Guests have the whole place to themselves
 - Deluxe Private Rooms
- iii. Common Hangout Area: A space has been made available for people to gather and discuss shared principles and interests in order to get to know one another.
- iv. Café / Canteen: Self-service cafes with little to no waiting staffs.
- v. The other amenities includes:
 - Lockers
 - Swimming Pool
 - Hot water
 - Laundry Services (Extra)
 - Common Television
 - Water Dispenser
 - Shower
 - Parking (private).

B. Caravan Park

Adrak Caravan Meadows:

Adrak Caravan Meadows is India's first Pilot Caravan Park set up at Nallathani, Idukki District, Kerala. As a Part of 'Keravan Kerala' Tourism project under Caravan Tourism policy envisions developing a wide framework for the growth and promotion of caravan tourism in Kerala, mostly in the private sector, by offering incentives for purchasing caravans and constructing caravan parks, outlining operational processes and procedures, establishing approval systems, etc.

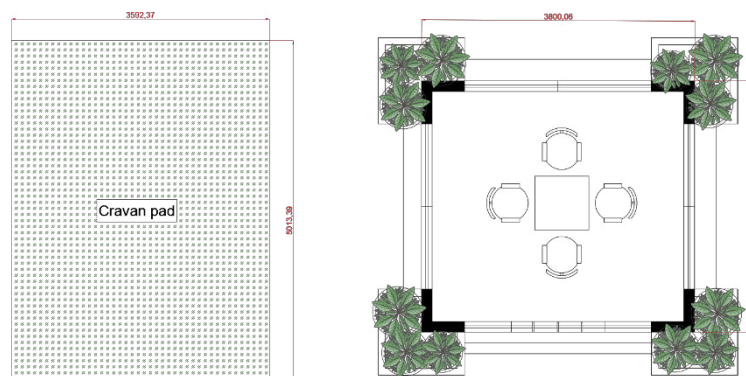


Figure 2 Caravan Parking Bay Layout- Idukki Kerala
Source: Author

Site Details: The Caravan Park is located at Nallathani, on a 50 acre developing plantation and has a Caravan park on the 50 cents of the plot with two parking Bays.

Design Philosophy: The core function of this caravan park is to provide a safe and convenient place for travellers to park their caravans or other recreational vehicles while they explore the surrounding area.

- And offer a range of amenities and services to make the stay comfortable and enjoyable for visitors.
- Maintaining and preserving the natural environment in and around the park by implementing sustainable practices and minimizing the impact of human activity.

The Amenities provided by Caravan Park Includes:

The Caravan Parking Bays on the site shall be provided as follows:

- At least one Caravan parking bay should have a minimum size of 15m x 6 m (Relaxable for hilly and high-altitude areas).
 - Every other Caravan parking bay should have a minimum size of 7.5 m x 5 m
- Other amenities include
 - Laundry facilities
 - Rest room/shower facilities
 - Convenience store
 - Recreational Hall
 - Game room
 - Library
 - Live entertainments
 - Concierge
 - Kitchen
 - Drivers Cabin
 - Open sitting and Recreational spaces

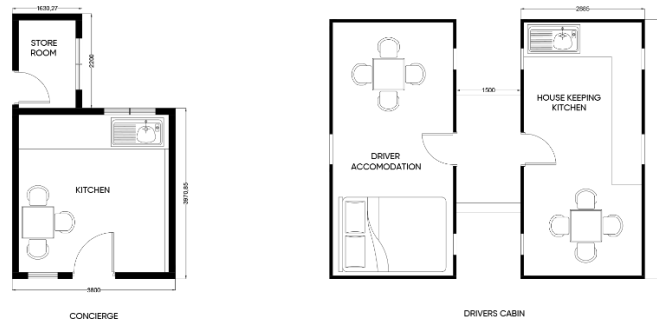


Figure 3 Concierge and Drivers accommodation at caravan park-Idukki, Kerala
Source: Author

III. SITE ANALYSIS

The site Vagamon is located at Idukki district of Kerala, India. The coordinates of the proposed site at Vagamon are 9°39'14.76"N, 76°55'39.49"E,



Figure 4 Location of the site in Idukki Kerala
Source: Author

Vagamon about 1,200 meters above sea level. The stunning hill town is situated between Kottayam and Idukki in Kerala. The area is rich with rolling green hills and luscious green tea plantations. It is a beautiful location that

tourists like. The most well-known landmark and a symbol of intercommunal unity in this area is the chain of three hills, Thangalpara Hill, Murugan Hill, and Kurisumala. Trekking, paragliding, mountaineering, rock-climbing, and other adventure sports are enjoyable possibilities for thrill-seekers.

Railway: The nearest rail head is at Kottayam Railway station, which lies in Kottayam district of Kerala. Vagamon is 66 km from Kottayam railway station and travel time is two hours by private vehicle.

Airport: The nearest Airport is at Cochin International Airport (COK), which lies in Ernakulam district of Kerala. Vagamon is 99 km from Cochin International Airport (COK) and travel time is two and half hours by private vehicle.



Figure 5 Proposed site at Vagamon, Idukki, Kerala.
Source: Author

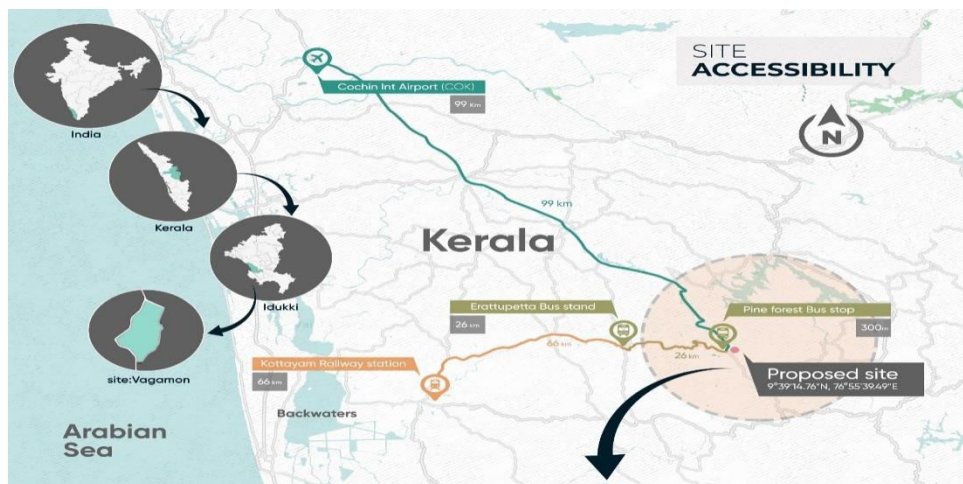


Figure 6 Tourism connectivity map of Vagamon within 6 km radius from site.
Source: Author

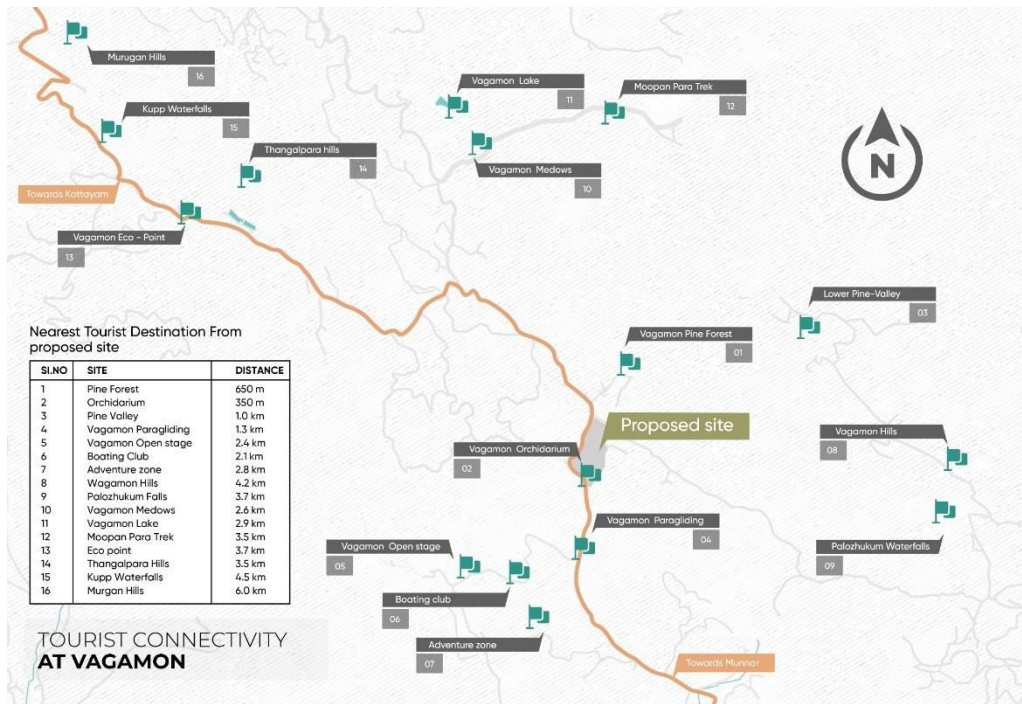


Figure 7 Site Accessibility map of Vagamon site
Source: Author

Climatic Factors:

Although Vagamon is an all-season destination, it is better to avoid visiting this city during monsoons as heavy rainfall makes the traveling tough. Hence, the best time to visit Vagamon is during the dry season’s i.e. summers (March to May) or winter (December to February). The driest month is January, with 31 mm | 1.2 inches of rain. Most precipitation falls in June, with an average of 508 mm | 20.0 inch. The average annual temperature is 22.6 °C | 72.6 °F in Vagamon. The Direction of wind is from SW – NE

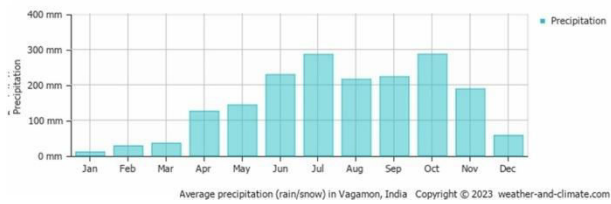


Figure 8 Rainfall Data of Vagamon
Source: weather-and-climate.com

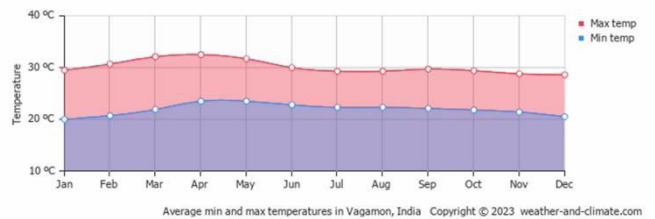


Figure 9 Average Temperature data for Vagamon
Source: weather-and-climate.com

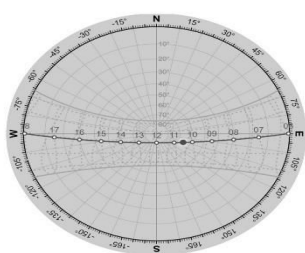
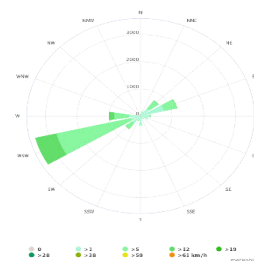


Figure 10 Sun path diagram for Vagamon site
Source:andrewmarsh.com



IV. PROPOSAL

4.1 Built Structure

The built environment must respond to traditional architecture of Kerala. It must respond to the time in terms of building materials if wants to survive for a longer period (Srivastava & Das, 2023). A sustainable method of building construction must be practiced using the principles of Vastushastra and traditional Architecture of Kerala for holistic development of the Vagamon Visitors center and Caravan Park (Nishant & Das, 2019).

Kerala's architecture is an example of Dravidian architecture, one of the three types of temples stated in the ancient writings of Vastu Shastra, and has been performed or followed in accordance with Indian Vedic architectural science (Vastu Shastra). In Kerala, a house is commonly referred to as a Veedu. The Veedu provides housing for tharavad, or joint-family kin. As a result, the joint family structure (tharavad—kin-ship system) encourages the custom of residing in a large home or mansion.

The different types of Kerala residential Vernacular Architecture includes:

- i. Ekasala: a single rectangular hall home in the shape of a "I".
- ii. Nalukettu: Landlords often own courtyard homes with four chambers (Ettukettu has eight chambers and Padinarukettu has sixteen chambers).
- iii. The size of the home annexes and the quantity of courtyards are signs of the family's social standing and wealth. The notions of sitting, spatial arrangement of rooms, material choice, dimensions, and construction details were drawn from Vastu Vidhya and Tachhushastram's. The central courtyard serves as the home's main point. Cross ventilation, deep overhangs, protected verandas, and steep pyramidal roofs with a 45 degree pitch are employed to combat the strong sun, excessive rain, and humidity.

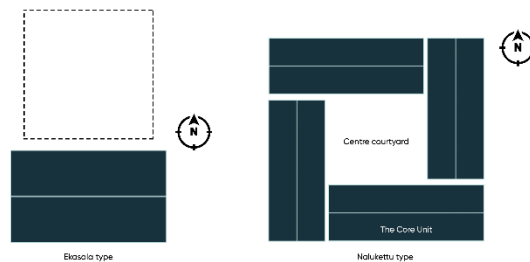


Figure 12 Kerala vernacular building types
Source: Author

Materials used include Laterite stone which is abundantly found. It is simple to cut, dress, and use soft laterite which is readily available at shallow depths, as construction blocks. It is a natural stone from the area that becomes more resilient and powerful over time. Plastering and low relief work used such enriched mortars. In Kerala, timber is still the major structural material and is widely accessible in a variety of species, from bamboo to teak and rosewood. Timber is used to construct walls, roof frames, and columns. After being fired in kilns and tempered with admixtures, clay is used to build walls, fill timber floors, and create bricks and tiles.

4.2 Landscape

Since it's a hill site a proper contour analysis has to be done for storm water management.

The greenery must respond to the local landscape. On the site there are four mature trees that have to be protected.



Figure 13 Landscaping present on the Vagamon site
The existing trees are *falcataria* , and shola grassland
Source: Author

4.3 Services

Water will be taken from the well available on the site and Sewage and Sullage will be treated on the site. The water will be used for landscape purposes. Electricity Line already exist so a transformer of suitable wattage will be installed. Solid waste Management practices will be implemented on the site.

V. CONCLUSION

Vagamon is capable of being developed in a way that would make a gateway to a number of different tourist destinations for a number of different tourist packages located nearby. It is a region that is emerging as a tourism destination and because of it, subsequent urbanization is happening due to uncontrolled tourism activities in the grasslands. The highland area coming under Western Ghats having patches of Shola Forests in the hillsides and are very good habitat for bird life, nesting and foraging. The developmental activity like tourism without proper planning disturbs and destroys the valuable wild flora and fauna. It is crucial to use a variety of techniques for managing the grasslands and biodiversity in order to achieve sustainable resource conservation and management. Sustainable practices include uses of locally available materials like clay for tiles and wallings, laterite stones for construction and lime mortar is for plastering, bamboo and timber remains other common building materials used. If the trend in unsustainable tourism development continues in the area, it will lead to the disappearance of endemic species and results in biodiversity loss. Hence, the sustainable building construction practices have to be developed for all the newer as well as for retro- fitting/redevelopment projects in design, construction and planning related.

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