



GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF TOURISM IN CHAMARAJANAGAR DISTRICT, KARNATAKA: A TALUK-WISE STUDY

Geography

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an important component of regional development, connecting natural resources, cultural heritage, transport, employment and local economies. Chamarajanagar district in the southern part of Karnataka has considerable tourism potential due to its forests, wildlife sanctuaries, hills, waterfalls, reservoirs, temples and tribal-cultural heritage. The present study analyzes the geographical distribution of tourism resources in five taluks namely Chamarajanagar, Gundlupet, Kollegal, Yelandur and Hanur with special reference to wildlife, religious, hill, eco- and water-based tourism. Tourism statistics 2023 report 22 destinations with more than 70 lakh visitors. Male Mahadeshwara Hills had over 40 lakh visitors, Himavad Gopalswamy Temple about 2.5 lakh and Bandipur Tiger Reserve about 1.4 lakh visitors. Tourism is concentrated mainly in Hanur and Gundlupet and this calls for integrated circuits, better infrastructure, eco-sensitive planning and systematic taluk-wise data collection.

KEYWORDS

Tourism Geography, Chamarajanagar, Taluk, Eco-tourism, Pilgrimage Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, Karnataka.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism geography is the study of the spatial distribution of attractions, the movement of visitors, accessibility, environmental conditions and socio-economic impacts of tourism. The Chamarajanagar district is situated at the southern end of Karnataka and possesses an area of 5,101 sq. km and is abundant in varied tourism resources. Its terrain includes semi-arid plains, forested hills, rivers and portions of the Nilgiri hill region. Its strategic location on the borders of Tamil Nadu and Kerala promotes interstate tourist movement. The district is divided into five taluks, Chamarajanagar, Gundlupet, Kollegal, Yelandur and Hanur. In general, the tourism resources can be classified into wildlife and eco-tourism, religious and pilgrimage tourism, hill and adventure tourism and waterfall, reservoir and scenic tourism. Important places of interest are Bandipur National Park, Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, Himavad Gopalswamy Betta and Male Mahadeshwara Hills which makes it an emerging tourism region.

Objectives of the Study

The study's main objectives are;

1. To study the geographical distribution of tourism resources in Chamarajanagar district.
2. To study the taluk-wise tourism potential of the district
3. To analyze available tourist footfall statistics for major destinations.
4. Identify the relationship between physical geography and tourism development.
5. To assess the main issues and perspectives of tourism development.
6. To suggest measures for the promotion of sustainable and balanced regional tourism development.

Database and Methodology

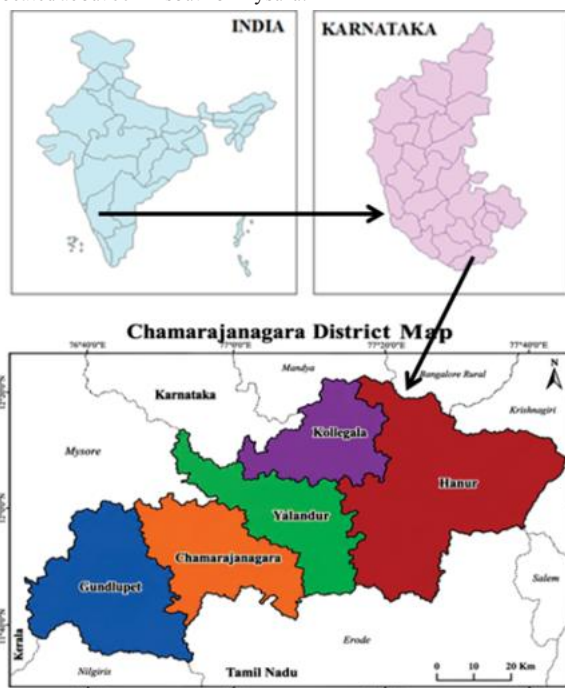
The study is based mainly on secondary information obtained from Chamarajanagar District Administration, Karnataka Tourism, tourism related government publications and reported tourism statistics. The geographical analysis includes relief, forests, wild life, water resources, cultural heritage, pilgrimage centers and accessibility.

One major methodological limitation should be noted. A continuous consolidated tourist-footfall table for all the five taluks is not available in the public domain. The Tourism Department is understood to be calculating visitor footfall on the basis of monthly information from individual tourist destinations but the figures reported publicly for 2023 are largely destination-specific. Hence, figures have not been artificially allocated to taluks. Where available, reliable destination-level figures are shown separately.

Geographical method involves spatial classification, comparative taluk analysis, interpretation of tourism concentration and assessment of physical and cultural factors affecting tourism.

Geographical Setting of Tourism

Chamarajanagar district is a district in the southern part of the state of Karnataka, India. It lies roughly between latitudes 11°40' and 12°15' North and longitudes 76°20' and 77°00' East. It is bordered by Mysuru district to the north, Tamil Nadu to the south and southeast and Kerala toward the southwest. Chamarajanagar is strategically located near the Western Ghats and is an important transition zone between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Chamarajanagar town is the district headquarters, located about 60 km south of Mysuru.



Chamarajanagar's primary foundation for its tourism development is the physical geography of Chamarajanagar. The district is covered with undulating plains, hill ranges, forests and river valleys. The closeness to the Eastern Ghats and the Nilgiri landscape makes for good wildlife, hill and nature tourism. Karnataka Tourism describes the district as a 'gateway to wildlife and the sacred hills' and emphasizes the value of Bandipur, BRT, Male Mahadeshwara Hills and Bharachukki Falls.

The forest environment is really important. Bandipur Tiger Reserve is a prime base for wildlife tourism. BRT Wildlife Sanctuary is known for wildlife viewing, birdwatching, trekking and cultural tourism. Karnataka Tourism says that BRT is located at the confluence of the

Eastern and Western Ghats and has recorded over 270 bird species

The Cauvery river system contributes to the scenic tourism of the district. Waterfall tourism and landscapes tourism and recreation opportunities around Bharachukki Falls. Reservoirs like Suvarnavathi and Chikkahole also have scenic and recreative potential. Bharachukki, Gundal Dam, Chikkahole Reservoir and other natural attractions are the tourism destinations in the district administration.

Taluk-Wise Tourism Resources
Table 1. Taluk-wise Major Tourism Resources of Chamarajanagar District

Taluk	Major tourism resources	Major tourism type	Geographical significance
Chamaraja nagar	Chamarajeshwara Temple, Karivaradarajaswamy Betta, Chikkahole Reservoir, Suvarnavathi Reservoir, Kanakagiri	Religious, scenic, hill and water tourism	District headquarters, cultural landscape and reservoir-based tourism
Gundlupet	Bandipur National Park, Himavad Gopalswamy Betta, Terakanambi, Vijayanarayana Temple	Wildlife, eco-tourism, pilgrimage and hill tourism	Forested hills, wildlife and proximity to Mysuru-Ooty route
Kollegal	Bharachukki Falls, Shivanasamudra area, Maradigudda, Wesley Bridge, Kanakagiri-related attractions	Waterfall, scenic, religious and heritage tourism	Cauvery valley, hills and waterfalls
Yelandur	Biligiri Rangaswamy Hills, BRT landscape, Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Gowrishwara Temple	Wildlife, pilgrimage, tribal and eco-tourism	Eastern Ghats–Western Ghats ecological transition
Hanur	Male Mahadeshwara Hills, Gundal Dam, Hogenakkal area, MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary	Pilgrimage, wildlife, hill and adventure tourism	Forested hill landscape and important interstate pilgrimage corridor

Source: Compiled from Chamarajanagar District Administration and Karnataka Tourism.

Taluk-Wise Tourist Footfall: Available 2023 Evidence

The year 2023 gives particularly useful evidence of the rapid growth of tourism in Chamarajanagar. The Tourism Department report said that in 2023, more than 70 lakh tourists visited 22 tourism destinations in Chamarajanagar district. The same report says that tourism grew substantially after the introduction of the Shakti scheme, which provided free bus travel for women.

Table 2. Available Tourist-Footfall Data by Major Taluk/ Destination, 2023

Taluk	Major destination	Reported visitor footfall, 2023	Status of data
Chamara-janagar	Chamarajeshwara Temple and other local attractions	Not separately published in the accessible source	Destination -level figure unavailable
Gundlupet	Bandipur Tiger Reserve	About 1.40 lakh	Reported destination figure
Gundlupet	Himavad Gopalswamy Temple	About 2.50 lakh	Reported destination figure
Kollegal	Bharachukki, Shivanasamudra and other attractions	Not separately published	Destination -level figure unavailable
Yelandur	BRT/Biligiri Rangaswamy landscape	Significant visitor flow; exact annual figure not published in accessible source	Exact taluk figure unavailable

Hanur	Male Mahadeshwara Hills	More than 40 lakh reported by Tourism Department; temple authority/media reports more than 50 lakh	Different reported estimates
District total	22 tourism destinations	More than 70 lakh	Reported district-level total

Source: Tourism Department figures reported by *The Times of India*; Bandipur visitor data also reported by *The Times of India* and ETTravelWorld.

Note: These destination-level figures should not be added together because visitors may visit more than one destination during the same trip and some attractions are geographically interconnected.

The Table show a very high concentration of tourism in the major pilgrimage and wildlife destinations. Major pilgrimage center is Male Mahadeshwara Hills. In 2023, the Tourism Department recorded more than 40 lakh visitors and the temple development authority recorded a higher number of more than 50 lakh devotees. This difference illustrates the need for a standard district tourism database.

Bandipur Tiger Reserve has witnessed around 1.4 lakh footfalls in 2023 and earned around 13.6 crore revenue through tourism-related activities including safaris, accommodation and entry-related revenue. Another temple, Himavad Gopalswamy Temple in Gundlupet taluk, saw around 2.5 lakh visitors in 2023.

Chamarajanagar Taluk: Cultural and Scenic Tourism

Chamarajanagar taluk is important because it contains the district headquarters and a number of cultural and scenic attractions. Chamarajeshwara Temple is one of the major religious monuments in the town and represents the historical association of the district with the Mysuru Wodeyar period. Karivaradarajaswamy Betta provides a combination of religious and hill tourism. Chikkahole and Suvarnavathi reservoirs contribute to scenic tourism.

The taluk also has potential for birdwatching and nature-based recreation around reservoirs and forest margins. The district tourism website identifies Bellatta reservoir as a suitable landscape for birds, nature lovers, photographers and researchers.

However, tourism in this taluk is comparatively less concentrated than in the major pilgrimage centres. Development of heritage walks, local museums, cultural festivals, reservoir viewpoints and improved interpretation facilities could increase visitor duration.

Gundlupet Taluk: Wildlife and Hill Tourism

Gundlupet is one of the important tourist taluks of the district. Its location on the Mysuru-Ooty route makes it highly accessible. The major attractions are the Bandipur National Park and Himavad Gopalswamy Betta.

The Himavad Gopalswamy Betta, associated with the ancient Gopalswamy Temple, rises to an altitude of about 1,450 meters. The hill is famous for its mist, forest sceneries and wildlife. Karnataka Tourism lists it as a major hill and pilgrimage attraction.

Bandipur is a safari based wildlife tourism destination. The main attractions are elephants, tigers, leopards, deer and other wild animals. Gundlupet is a major eco-tourism zone due to the combination of wildlife, forest scenery and hill climate.

The reported figures of about 1.4 lakh visitors to Bandipur and about 2.5 lakh visitors to Himavad Gopalswamy Temple in 2023 show the significance of this taluk in the tourism economy of the district.

Kollegal Taluk: Waterfall and River Tourism

Kollegal represents a different tourism geography dominated by the Cauvery river valley, hills, waterfalls and religious centres. Bharachukki Falls is one of the best-known attractions. The river landscape, rocky terrain and forest environment create opportunities for scenic tourism, photography and recreation.

Other attractions include Maradigudda, Wesley Bridge, Kanakagiri, Chilkawadi and other religious and natural locations. The district tourism department identifies the Kollegal region as having considerable natural and cultural tourism resources.

The main challenge is that the available public data do not provide a reliable annual visitor number for each Kollegal attraction. Consequently, future research should collect monthly visitor data at Bharachukki, Shivanasamudra, Wesley Bridge and associated sites.

Yelandur Taluk: Biligiri Hills and Eco-Cultural Tourism

Yelandur has a strong ecological and cultural tourism base because of its relationship with the Biligiri Hills. BRT represents an important ecological transition between the Eastern and Western Ghats. The region supports diverse vegetation and wildlife and has a strong association with the Soliga tribal community.

The Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple provides a religious dimension to the tourism landscape. K.Gudi provides opportunities for wildlife viewing, safari and nature-based tourism. The district tourism administration describes K.Gudi as a natural reserve visited by tourists, researchers and wildlife enthusiasts, with forest safari facilities.

The major opportunity for Yelandur is therefore eco-cultural tourism, in which wildlife, biodiversity, tribal knowledge, traditional culture and pilgrimage can be integrated without damaging the ecological environment.

Hanur Taluk: Pilgrimage Tourism and Forest Landscape

Hanur is presently one of the most significant tourism taluks in Chamarajanagar because of Male Mahadeshwara Hills. The hill is located at approximately 900 metres elevation and is surrounded by dense forests.

Male Mahadeshwara Hills is a major pilgrimage center related to Sri Mahadeshwara Swamy. The scale of pilgrimage is phenomenal. The Tourism Department recorded over 40 lakh visitors in 2023, while the temple authority estimated the number of devotees at over 50 lakh. The temple was reported to have earned around 63 crore in revenue in 2023.

Not only a pilgrimage center Hanur is. The Male Mahadeshwara wildlife sanctuary around it, lends scope for wildlife tourism and eco-tourism. A pilot tiger safari was started at P.G. Palya in December 2023 with an 18 km route and seven safari vehicles planned depending on the number of visitors.

Gundal dam is another scenic resource of Hanur taluk. The district administration says it is a reservoir built across the Gundal River and is important for irrigation and water supply.

Spatial Pattern of Tourism

The tourism geography of Chamarajanagar shows three major spatial patterns.

First, the concentration of pilgrimage is strongest at Male Mahadeshwara Hills, Hanur. Hanur is a major tourism node because of the huge volume of visitors.

Secondly, the wildlife tourism is primarily focused in Gundlupet and Biligiri Hills region. Bandipur and Himavad Gopalaswamy Betta is a strong tourism corridor between Mysuru and the Nilgiri area.

Third, dispersed scenic tourism is situated in Chamarajanagar and Kollegal as reservoirs, hills, waterfalls and cultural monuments.

So the tourism network can be seen as a set of interconnected circuits, rather than as isolated tourist destinations: Mysuru-Gundlupet-Bandipur-Himavad Gopalaswamy route
Eco-cultural circuit of Chamarajanagar-BRT-Yelandur
Kollegal-Bharachukki-Shivanasamudra circuit
Kollegal-Hanur-Male Mahadeshwara pilgrimage and wildlife circuit

Such circuit development can spread tourists more evenly and increase length of stay.

Major Problems of Tourism Development: The district has huge tourism potential, but there are many problems.

- Poor Tourism Infrastructure:** Some attractions are deficient in adequate toilet facilities, drinking water, parking, accommodation and visitor interpretation facilities.
- Transport Constraints:** Better but environmentally sensitive

road connectivity to forest and hill destinations.

- Seasonality:** Certain scenic spots and waterfalls are more popular during specific seasons.
- Environmental Pressure:** Over tourism can bring about plastic waste, congestion in traffic, noise and disturbance to wildlife.
- Poor Statistical Data:** Absence of uniform taluk-wise tourist database hampers detailed geographically analysis.
- Visitor concentration:** Very high concentration of visitors at MM Hills exerts pressure on infrastructure and environment.
- Limited local involvement:** Local communities can receive more economic benefits from homestays, handicrafts, guiding, transport and cultural tourism.

Suggestions For Sustainable Tourism Development: it is Recommended that the Following Measures be Taken.

Taluk Level Tourism Database: The Department of Tourism should develop a common digital tourism monitoring system. All major destinations should keep monthly records of domestic and foreign visitors, age group, origin, purpose of visit, length of stay and expenditure.

Integrated Tourism Circuits: Instead of isolated attractions, integrated circuits should be developed linking wildlife, pilgrimage, waterfalls, reservoirs and cultural sites.

Eco-sensitive Tourism: For tourism development around Bandipur, BRT and MM Hills, carrying capacity principles should be followed. The plastic restrictions, the controlled vehicle entry and the scientific waste management have to be enhanced.

Community Participation: Soliga & other local communities should be involved in nature interpretation, handicrafts, cultural programs, guiding, homestays and local food services.

Digital Promotion: GIS-based tourism maps, QR-code interpretation boards, mobile apps and multilingual information systems may improve the visitor experience.

Improved Infrastructure: Basic amenities like toilets, drinking water, parking, emergency medical services, signage and accommodation should be improved, especially at emerging tourist destinations.

CONCLUSION

Chamarajanagar district has a distinctive tourism geography based on the interaction of hills, forests, wildlife, rivers, waterfalls and cultural traditions. The five taluks have different specialization in tourism. Wildlife and hill tourism is predominant in Gundlupet, pilgrimage and forest tourism in Hanur, eco-cultural potential in Yelandur, waterfall, river and scenic tourism in Kollegal and cultural, heritage, reservoir and hill attractions in Chamarajanagar taluk.

The available statistics for 2023 reveal the enormous scale of tourism in the district. There were over 70 lakh visitors to 22 tourist destinations, of which Male Mahadeshwara Hills had the highest share and Himavad Gopalaswamy Temple and Bandipur contributed significantly.

The greatest opportunity from a geographical perspective is to move away from destination-centred tourism to regionally integrated sustainable tourism. A balanced tourism network connecting Chamarajanagar, Gundlupet, Kollegal, Yelandur and Hanur can create jobs, support local businesses and grow the district economy while safeguarding its forests and cultural heritage.

The most important requirement for future academic research is a reliable annual taluk-wise tourist database. Statistics available to the public are currently mostly destination-based. Therefore, systematic collection of taluk level tourist arrivals, tourist expenditure, accommodation capacity, transport flows and seasonal variation should become an important component of tourism planning in Chamarajanagar district.

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