

SKILLING THE UNSKILLED: VIGNETTES FROM MESMERISING MAHABALIPURAM

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ABSTRACT

The continually growing travel and tourism industry in India has proved to be a huge economy booster and plays a particularly critical role in the socio-economic development of local communities. Rapid developments and advancements in tourism bestow innumerable benefits on the involved destinations. However, the actual potential and scope of tourism development in a particular area can be fully understood only after a thorough analytical study. In a bid to bring to light the significant elements that need additional attention for the promotion and development of sustainable tourism, the prominent historical tourist destination of Mahabalipuram, the city of architectural splendour situated on the Coromandel Coast of Bay of Bengal, in Kancheepuram district, Tamilnadu, is taken up for this investigative research study. It enjoys the historic distinction of having once been a flourishing port city and an important center of art, architecture, culture, and literature in the 7th century during the reign of the Pallava dynasty. Today, it is affirmably one of the city's iconic landmarks. As late as the 20th century, the architectural magnificence of its historical monuments was duly recognized by the Government as one of the significant tourist destinations in the country and it was listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1984. From the 1990s onwards, the Ministry of Tourism focused its attention and efforts on promoting tourism, highlighting the city's glorious heritage and rich culture. Every year, both State and Central Governments allocate a definite fund for developmental projects, aimed at improving the available infrastructure and providing better facilities in Mahabalipuram. In tandem with such commendable tourism promotion measures, it is suggested that the host community or the local residents are sensitized to the need to sustain tourism in this destination by emphasizing the important role they can play in accelerating tourism development. Tourism can develop and grow in leaps and bounds by connecting guest travelers with the resident hosts and facilitating their interaction. The potential outcome of such community-based tourism is a better understanding of the prevailing socio-cultural identity, the local traditions, indigenous lifestyle, skilled art and handicrafts besides the natural environment. Indeed, the very livelihood of many communities may depend on tourism. Increased tourist footfall will then, in turn, boost the economic growth of the region. This exploratory paper is construed using a systematic compilation of rich primary data comprising of field visits, surveys, observation inputs, Government reports, etc.

KEYWORDS: Mahabalipuram, Tourism, Skills, Sustainability