

Review Article

Multi-Dimensional Strands of Rural Tourism in Alankuppam- A Stimulus for Destination Branding

¹Dr. A. Karthik, ²Ms. Mary Jeniffer, ³Dr. R. C. Anu Chandran

¹Assistant Professor, Tourism Department, Perunthalaivar Kamarajar Arts College.

²Research Scholar, Dept of Tourism Studies, Pondicherry University.

³Associate professor, Dept of Tourism Studies, Pondicherry University.

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Abstract: *The concept of 'Rural Tourism' has gained immense traction for two decades and has created a niche impact on the minds of tourists as a special-interest form. The ideals of responsible tourism initiatives (RT) are central as regards the intricacies and approaches of branding rural destinations. Alankuppam in Puducherry, a designated rural tourism haven dots a unique spot in the tourism map of south India owing to its enamoring resources and features. Several gaps were identified with respect to organized tourism promotion at Alankuppam, especially a well-designed branding campaign that shall synergize the indigenous aspects. This paper conceived as an explorative research method approach; while delving deeper into the potentials of Alankuppam also envisages the key roles which may be played by NGO's and other stakeholders in the overall branding exercise. The present work examines the possibilities to ingrain newer physical and psychological meanings of Alankuppam to contribute to the place making.*

Keywords: *Rural Tourism, Alankuppam, Destination Branding Campaign, Responsible Initiatives (RT), Place Making.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term “Rural Tourism” provokes a tourist to spend an empirical time nuance by involving in different facets of its ethnic, indigenous and aesthetic practices in a village where ‘rural tourism’ concept is emerged. There is a closer relation with rural tourism and initiatives of responsible tourism in the context of Indian scenario, especially in the French town “Puducherry”. The village ‘Alankuppam’ has witnessed an innovation model presenting a new perception with development of qualitative trends which includes sustainable tourism development, promotion of new forms of tourism, especially nature-based tourism, culture, rural areas, heritage, arts and crafts, eliminating poverty etc.

It is evident that Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) promote the destination (Kumar et.al 2021). Pondicherry Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) is promoting Puducherry as a unique destination (Kumar, 2018) for the mind and spirit of the tourist who is looking for an authentic experience that will connect him to his inner self. Puducherry Arts and Crafts Village (ACV) promoted by Puducherry tourism department is timely and fits well with the new trends Alankuppam. The concepts of Arts and Crafts Villages (ACV) has been conceived not only to promote Pondicherry as the most preferred tourist destination but also to give encouragements and support to the arts and artisans of the region. In addition, talented artists from over the country will be encouraged to be part of this innovative concept and experience Puducherry’s unique ambience and timelessness. Government of Puducherry has accorded the status of industry to tourism with the result a breeze of awakening and enthusiasm is now flowing across the region, Alankuppam. Government of Pondicherry in an effort to augment the tourist potential of the region has embarked on a unique and novel concept of developing ACV (Arts and Craft Villages).

A. Need for the Study

In the portray of world tourism map, Puducherry has a special iconic significance of its French style embedded in the beautification of the small-town inculcating to this awesome ambience an extra glow added up is the concept of ‘rural tourism’ or ‘village tourism’ (Kumar et al, 2020). Where the concept is inclined with sustainable and responsible elements. The present study explores the multi-dimensional attributes that can highlight the rural tourism potential of Alankuppam in its destination branding campaign. The nuances of responsible tourism that is responsible for tourism development at Alankuppam also need to be examined for its further destination branding skill set in this place.

B. Objectives

This study has been conducted with the broad objective of unraveling the rural tourism potential of Alankuppam.

- To examine intricacies and approaches of branding Alankuppam as a rural tourism destination
- To explore the unique vibes and attributes of rural tourism in Alankuppam that can influence the act of visitation with key feature of responsibility in the minds of tourist
- To scrutinize the possibilities to ingrain newer physical and psychological meanings of Alankuppam to contribute to the place making
- To highlight the indigenous resources responsible for 'destination branding campaign' in Alankuppam.

C. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Alankuppam in Puducherry from the point of view of its village background, for further development and growth with responsible initiatives as a cynosure of rural tourism. The study also envisages concrete outcomes that can revive the existing village set up to create awareness among weekend tourist to throng for rural tourism experiences in Alankuppam, Puducherry by steps such as destination branding by labeling Alankuppam as 'rural tourism' place in the global map of tourism. The inherent charms that can cast a spell on the potential tourists are also brought out in this work by branding destination campaign.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is an explorative study which employ the case study method - due to the nature and dimensions of the study area. Delphi Technique and Media Archives along with keen observation and participation have been tapped for gathering data. Concrete and valuable insights provided by a group of academic personnel's helps out a better understanding and an eye opener about the destination significances for obtaining inferences. The different sections of the research paper follow the TAILMRDCR structure (Kumar, 2023).

A. Review of Literature

a) Study on "Rural Tourism with Special reference to Alankuppam"

According to Garcia Ramon (1995), tourism becomes an accumulator to develop the standard of livelihood within the rural area and bog down the rural migration specifically in the regions which are less developed. The author further discusses tourism would generate further financial gain to the rural communities and also it creates job opportunities, improves rural economy, gives extensive support to existing businesses and contributes to start new ones. Helen Woodruffe (2000), asserts that tourism is a significant industry all over the world today. Because of the advancement of international travel mean, nowadays people are travelling more frequently than ever before. Since, maximum portion of India's population lives in the villages, rural tourism is significant for this nation. Rural tourism will increase the employment options for rural residents and give them a chance to interact with the world community. Recently, the Indian government has recognized the value that rural India can bring to the globe.

According to Roy A. Cook (2007), tourism should be incorporated into a region's local culture, practices and environment. Tourism should derive from that particular area's natural, historical and cultural attractions. According to and in accordance with the ecotourism principle, a significant number of local resources from construction supplies to food, should be utilized to satisfy the demands of visitors. Bontron and Lasnier (1997), rural tourism impact differs mainly among rural areas and lean on a number of causes including manpower attributes and seasonality problems. A model of unified rural tourism, which takes account of the diversified resources like (environmental, cultural, social, economic), their usages and also the role of applicable stakeholders was advanced to explore competent strategies of promoting tourism as a part of a rural destination development strategy. Lane B (1994) argues that "rural tourism is a form of tourism that is located in rural areas, reflecting the differing and complex patterns of rural environment, economy, history and location." Opperman (1997), opines that rural tourism can be characterized as tourism in a "non-urban territory where human (land related economic) activity is going on, primarily agriculture related activities."

Sharpley (1996) author describes the main reasons for increasing popularity of tourism in the rural side and its benefits to the local community. Nowadays trends changing among the tourists, most of the people residing in urban side wanted to explore rural ambience, sightseeing and related activities. Rural tourism contributes alternative source of job for the local community who are residing near the rural destinations. Locals get involved in the tourism activities so, that they also will get benefit out of it. Author strongly states as part of sustainable environment, rural tourism is a type of tourism which strongly recommends or follows the enhanced environmental awareness and sustainability. Fleisher and Falenstein (2000) precisely state that "the promotion of small-scale tourism is intuitively perceived as an appropriate type of economic development for rural areas." Rural areas are not any longer related purely with agricultural artefact productions however are seen as regions for the incitement of latest socio-economic activity.

According to Butler (1998), it is noted that the global economic and social forces are shaping up both the nature and form of the rural landscape. It also affects how we value the rural tourism and use it. In spite of the admiring review credited to rural tourism, Butler and Clark (1992) suggested that it is not necessarily a solution to rural development due

to the reasons such as income leakages, volatility and low pay. Kumar et al. (2020) focused on Rural tourism being an additional source of income for the villagers which also provides employment for the youth.

b) *Fascinating Facets of Rural Tourism Promotion in Alankuppam (Sanjeevi Nagar), Puducherry*

Alankuppam is a small village in Puducherry Union Territory, which is situated near Auroville, Tamil Nadu. Alankuppam village is identified as one of the potential rural tourism sites by Ministry of Tourism for its expertise in crafts and local community involvement in tourism activities. The Puducherry tourism department along with different stakeholders initiates different rural tourism development activities in Alankuppam. With the tie-up of the Ille-et-Vilaine (Brittany region, France) administration, Puducherry government urged to develop the Alankuppam rural circuit under the 2nd call for Joint Indo-French Projects in Support of Decentralized Cooperation for the year 2015-16, this project marks the government's first rural tourism project in Puducherry. Likewise, many stakeholders involve in the village to improve the livelihood of local people, empowerment of women by giving different small scale business trainings, development of tourism activities and for promoting local art farms.

Mohanam is a non-profit organization that promotes rich cultural heritage of Puducherry. It exemplifies the splendor, customs, innovations, and ongoing development of South Indian art and culture. The Mohanam Village Heritage Centre was created by a group of young men from the villages around Auroville, a global city in Tamil Nadu. The heritage center was built by young Tamils from various villages to serve as a link between the old and the new, the old and the young, and between Auroville and the surrounding villages.

The Centre is located in Sanjeevi Nagar village of Puducherry Union territory in India. It is close to Auroville, the universal city dedicated to an experiment in human unity. Cultural diversity is in jeopardy as a result of globalization and the gradual acculturation of the entire world to global culture. Through its courses, programs, activities, and performances, Mohanam Cultural Centre helps in developing the rich arts of Tamil Nadu back to the villages and the rest of the world. The heritage center serves as a real link between the past and the future by giving villagers and Aurovillians a place to share their divine expressions. Yoga, traditional healing, meditation, ecological harmony, health awareness, and a host of other topics are taught by Aurovillians and locals with knowledge and expertise.

Balasundaram is the group's leader. He is a cultural and social activist who is particularly interested in giving young people more power. He attended the international youth camp "Surfing the Creative" in Boulder, Colorado, United States, in 2004. He has found a lot of inspiration in this. He established the Mohanam Performing Arts Youth Group under the direction of his mentors Meliisa Michaels of Golden Bridge in Boulder, USA, and Aurelio of Mohanam Cultural Centre. Balu is an Aurovillian, hailing from Sanjeevi Nagar near Auroville, and has been involved with Mohanam Cultural Centre since its inception in 2000. Balu believes in bringing peace and harmony to the world by involving the youth through travel exchange, knowledge and experience, building a youth network internationally and creating awareness about local and global cultures.

c) *Meticulous Cultural Festivals in Alankuppam Village*

Throughout the year, Mohanam organizes festivals and cultural events. Pongal, Children's Day, Teachers Day, Women's Day, Earth Day, Christmas, and Vijayadasami are just a few of the special occasions that the center celebrates.

The centre organizes cultural and traditional events in the villagers near Auroville during Pongal, a special Tamil festival. Along with contemporary sports like the slow motorbike race and slow bicycle race, traditional games like Kabaddi, Ilavatta Kal Thookuthal, and Nondiaattam are played. Through the traditional Tamil art known as "Kolam," village women have the opportunity to showcase their artistic abilities. A number of them participate in the competition each year and exhibit their stunning designs in Kolam. Women in the area perform the local art of kolam on a daily basis, adorning their doorsteps using chalk-drawn traditional geometric mazes. In Sanjeevi Nagar village, Mohanam has been holding Kolam festivals for the past four years. Mohanam hopes that similar events will occur in other villages nearby and encourage young people to continue playing traditional games. With the help of the villagers, Mohanam Cultural Centre will soon introduce more traditional and folk games and events.

B. *SWOT Analysis*

A SWOT analysis was performed to examine the unique vibes and attributes of rural tourism in Alankuppam. The strengths and weakness are as follows:

Strengths	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positioning as a tourist's destination centered on spiritual and wellness tourism, and a unique heritage by destination branding campaign. Several places of spiritual and religious importance. Leading village in the making of handcrafts like ceramic items, terracotta's, paper products, bamboo and wax related products, which attracts tourists to visit. Very close to the famous tourism spot of Auroville. Proximity to Chennai. Eco-friendly environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrowed land available due to dispersed and continuous land. Relatively poor landscaping of urban areas leading to congestion. Declined competitiveness of SMEs. Lack of financial support and dependence on central government for resources. No monitoring agencies Unavailability of permanent tourism office. Lack of accommodation facilities. It may restrict the tourists to spend more time in the destination.

The SWOT analysis also revealed the opportunities and threats of the rural tourism in Alankuppam as follows:

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for growth in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Service sector – tourism, and IT ✓ Electronics / light engineering and processing industries. Integrating the development of select regions of Puducherry, rural tourism concept. with the neighboring regions can also trigger growth. Huge opportunity for Homestay concept accommodations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pollution, landscape congestion, decreasing water table across and coastal erosion. Uniformity in taxes has removed advantages which was earlier available for Puducherry. Challenges posed in preserving the heritage structures.

III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A. Major Findings

- Product development can fetch substantial gains in the context of prospective tourism development in Alankuppam. Raising market awareness of the village vis-à-vis new product formulation for tourism; will be path-breaking.
- Improved access to the site is mandatory. Furthermore, the standard of transport and infrastructure needs to be improved to enhance visitor satisfaction.
- Responsible tourism management is needed for the growth of Alankuppam.
- Synergy between tourism and stakeholders of the rural tourism concept should be spread across for the preservation and conservation of cultural practices in Alankuppam.
- There is a need to establish quality standards and systems of good practice to protect the ethnics, indigenous and aesthetic involvement between host and guest interaction in village visit.
- Improve skill levels of local people and create awareness on the benefits of rural tourism.
- A museum may be set-up to provide information to tourists. Some events and classes can be undertaken among the visitors by the local community.
- The concept of responsible tourism could be clubbed with rural tourism which would be great for prospective tourists as well as future generations.

B. Conclusion

The study reveals that Puducherry had a potential to promote Rural Tourism in the long run process with a clear vision and dynamic implementation of destination branding campaign. It argues that Alankuppam has some unique character and resources to develop a rural tourism destination by its signature of destination branding campaign strategy which can be helpful in promotion of this rural destination (Kumar, 2018; Kumar et. al, 2020). The government has to give the facilities and amenities in that particular area to develop this village in the global map of tourism. A model for rural tourism can be framed with the joint work of PPP (Public Private Partnership) model (Kumar et. al, 2015) in Alankuppam, Puducherry would be the put forth by government policy decision and private players in tourism. The PTDC can also help in development of marketing strategy for the rural destination by having a Facebook page and other social media channels (Kumar, 2018; Kumar et. al, 2021).

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