

Rural Tourism as a Catalyst for Sustainable Livelihoods: A Comparative Economic Analysis of Coorg (Karnataka) and Ananthagiri Hills (Telangana)

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Abstract- Rural tourism holds the potential to serve as a transformative tool for local economies, offering avenues for cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development. This study compares two rural tourism destinations in India: Coorg, Karnataka, a thriving tourism hub, and Ananthagiri Hills, Telangana, which remains largely untapped. Coorg's tourism economy, contributing ₹400 crore in revenue from 2.7 million visitors in 2022, benefits from strong infrastructure, government support, and community involvement. In contrast, Ananthagiri Hills, with 1,00,000 visitors and ₹10 crore in revenue during the same period, faces challenges such as limited connectivity, lack of community integration, and insufficient marketing efforts. Through a detailed comparative analysis, this paper examines the key drivers of success in Coorg and identifies actionable strategies to unlock the tourism potential of Ananthagiri Hills for sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Sustainable Livelihoods, Economic Development, Community-Based Tourism, Coorg, Ananthagiri Hills

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is a lifeline to communities where the chances of economic stagnation and outmigration are at its peak. Rural tourism as a means of balanced development with cultural and ecological conservation is the answer to sustainable growth. In a country like India where rural regions are teeming with resources on the natural and cultural front, tourism has the potential to create jobs, nurture local business and restore traditional livelihoods anew. As revealed by the Ministry of tourism, Govt of India (2022), rural tourism in India contributed 2.8% to economic growth with the direct employment of over 11 million providing evidence for its socio-economic relevance. The current paper analyses two different rural tourism destination cases (Coorg, Karnataka and Ananthagiri Hills in Telangana) to examine how the destination operates. Coorg is a developed model but a place in need of other infrastructure upgrade Ananthagiri Hills. Following their contrasts, this study attempts to explain what leads to success and how the same patterns can be used by regions such as Ananthagiri Hills.

OBJECTIVES

- 1.To identify the determinants of Coorg as a tourism success story for rural tourism
2. To examine the restraining factors for tourism in Ananthagiri Hills
- 3.To propose feasible recommendations for exploring tourism potential in Ananthagiri Hills

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

● Rural Tourism Awareness

Rural tourism offers a twofold advantage: better diversification of rural economies by income and preservation of culture, heritage and natural resource base. Some good examples on a global level are Italian agritourism, even though one might mention Costa Rica-friendly eco-tourism. In 2022, Rural tourism growth in both countries was similar with 15% for India and 10% for Bangladesh respectively (World Tourism Organization 2023).

The shared components of these models are effective infrastructure, improving local entrepreneurship and a heavy focus on sustainability. Rural tourism has been popular in India assisted through the program Swadesh Darshan which expanded 15 thematic Tourism Circuits and Prasad scheme aimed at rejuvenating pilgrimage destinations. Yet, disparities in implementation is also evident from the Indian Tourism Statistics Report (2022) that states that rural tourism revenues.

● Coorg: A Development Story

It is the case of Coorg (Kodagu), how rural tourism can literally bring a change in the region. Bangalore (245 km) and Mysore (117 km) proximity permitted Coorg to attract 2.7 million visitors and generate revenue of ₹400 crore in 2022 through Karnataka Tourism Report (2022). 900+ Homestays, eco-friendly resorts and plantation stays all connect local communities with the tourism experiences they produce.

The fame of Coorg no doubt was built up on the back of its own marketing efforts, the “explore kodagu” initiative launched by the government in 2021 for eco-tourism gamblers. It was just this initiative that lifted visitor traffic by 12% over pre-pandemic levels.

● Challenges in Ananthagiri Hills

Ananthagiri Hills, despite its scenic landscapes and proximity to Hyderabad (82 km), received only 100,000 visitors in 2022, generating ₹10 crore in revenue (Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook, 2022). Its potential remains underutilized due to challenges such as poor road infrastructure, limited accommodations, and lack of community involvement.

Furthermore, Ananthagiri Hills has not been marketed effectively as a tourist destination. According to a report by the Telangana Tourism Development Corporation (2022), less than 5% of Telangana’s tourism budget was allocated to rural destinations like Ananthagiri, compared to 35% allocated to urban hotspots like Hyderabad.

METHODOLOGY

A comparative method was used to study Coorg and Ananthagiri Hills. The research is built on secondary data from government reports, tourism statistics, academic studies etc., following key parameters like infrastructure/community engagement/eco economic impact were analyzed. In addition, quantitative observations such as local business participation and government action were also taken into account.

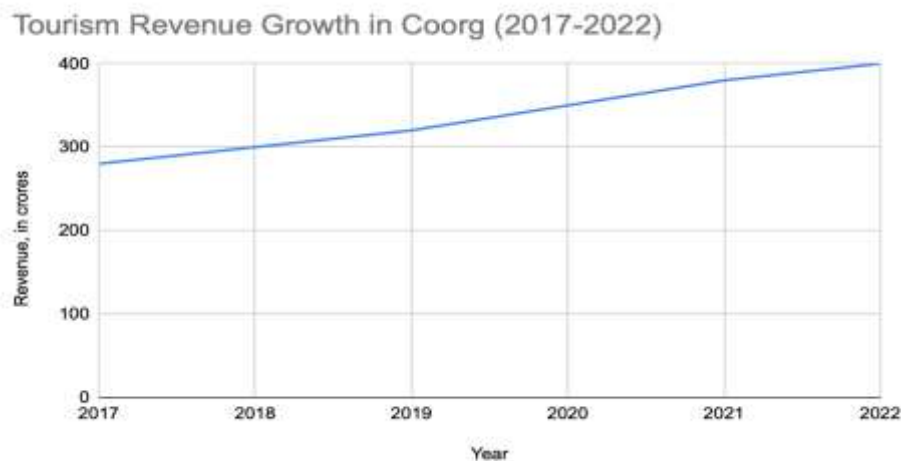
ANALYSIS

● Coorg: An Evident Model

What sustains Coorg tourism:

- **Road connectivity & infrastructure:** Coorg is linked to the major cities by good quality roads (85% of roads on all weather standards, Karnataka Road Development Corporation 2022).
- **Community Participation:** Nearly 60% Population of Coorg is directly or indirectly involved in tourism which generates ₹75,000 per capita on an annual basis from tourism (Kodagu District Economic Profile, 2022).
- **Different Items:** Plantation tours, Wildlife safaris, and local cultural events like the Puthari harvest festival of Coorg (which attracted nearly 50000 visitors during 2022)

Graph 01: Tourism Revenue Growth in Coorg (2017-2022)



Sources: Karnataka Tourism Department. (2022). Tourism statistics: Kodagu (Coorg). Karnataka Tourism Board. Retrieved from <https://karnatakaturism.org>

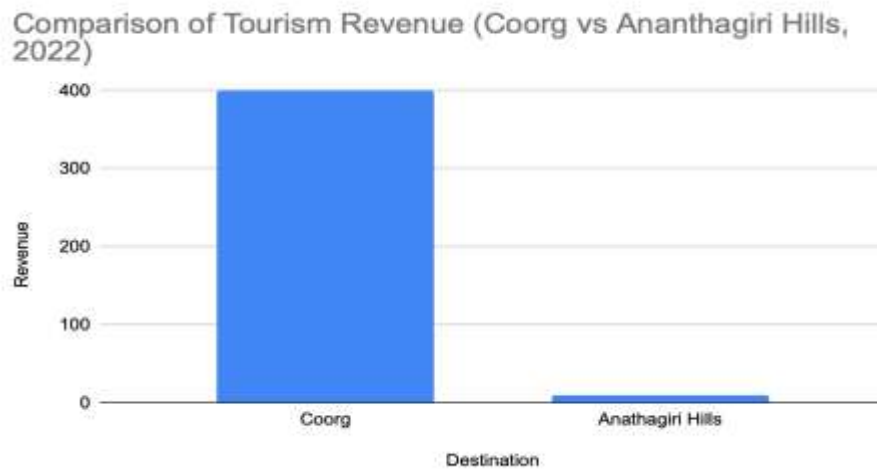
Explanation of Graph 01: This graph illustrates the steady growth of tourism revenue in Coorg over the years, from ₹280 crore in 2017 to ₹400 crore in 2022. The line graph visually captures the upward trend, indicating that Coorg’s tourism industry has benefited from improved infrastructure, increased marketing efforts, and rising demand. The year-over-year growth reflects the success of Coorg’s strategies in attracting eco-conscious travelers and diversifying tourism offerings, including homestays and plantation tours.

● Ananthagiri Hills: The Bottlenecks of Growth

Ananthagiri Hills, despite being so beautiful has many hurdles to jump over:

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Only 45% roads are of all-weather standard and it is 70 km away to nearest airport, hindering accessibility (Telangana State Infrastructure Development Report 2022).
- **Less community participation:** The portion of Ananthagiri locals who work in tourism are less than 10% as in Coorg (Telangana Rural Tourism Survey, 2022).
- Ananthagiri Hills got lesser as compared to ₹5 crore spent on marketing in year 2022 and what is reserved for Hyderabad Tourism is ₹50 crore.

Graph 02: Comparison of Tourism Revenue (Coorg vs Ananthagiri Hills, 2022)



Source: Karnataka Tourism Report. (2022). Tourism revenue in Coorg (Kodagu). Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook. (2022). Tourism statistics for Ananthagiri Hills.

Graph 02 Explanation: Comparison of Tourism Revenue (Coorg vs Ananthagiri Hills, 2022) Graph Type: Bar Chart Explanation: This bar chart compares the tourism revenue of Coorg and Ananthagiri Hills in 2022. The stark contrast in revenue (₹400 crore for Coorg vs ₹10 crore for Ananthagiri Hills) highlights the untapped potential of Ananthagiri Hills. The chart emphasizes the need for infrastructure development, increased community participation, and effective marketing strategies to boost Ananthagiri Hills' tourism sector to match Coorg's success.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM LESSONS TO ANANTHAGIRI HILLS FROM COORG

The success of Coorg in rural tourism can come as life changing lessons to Ananthagiri Hills and aid towards sustainable tourism development. These include:

- **Infrastructure and Connectivity**

The infrastructure and road networks in Coorg have developed with time with fantastic connectivity from one more major city like Bangalore as well Mysore which caters tourists to enjoy their trip. Weekend tourism thrives on the availability for easy access. Investment in good road connectivity and travellers facilities will improve the accessibility of Ananthagiri Hills during the year by attracting more visitors in all seasons.

- **Community Engagement**

In Coorg, more than 60% locals are part of tourism either by participating in homestays, guiding etc. I mean Ananthagiri Hills can do this by integrating local communities in tourism ventures and ensuring greater economic participation. Facilitating women facilitation of homestays and small scale business would also build the community.

- **Diverse tourism products**

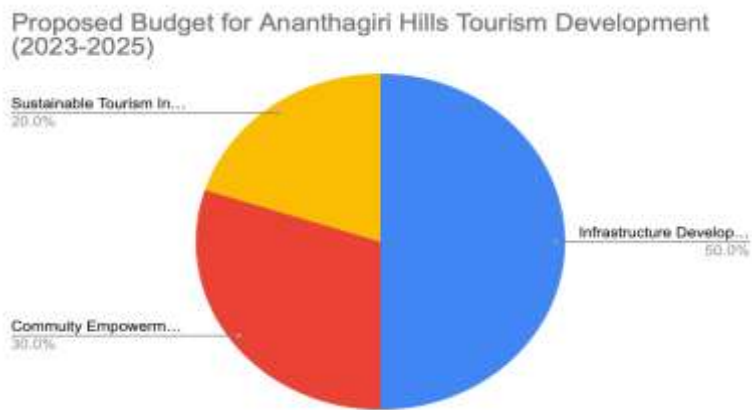
Among Plantation tours, wildlife safaris and cultural traveller experience the one thing most tourists experience is that Coorg is for Everyone As Ananthagiri Hills could invest in nature based tourism by offering not just trekking but also bird watching and (as has been seen in other parts) create seasonal festivals to let traditions lend a dimension of local traditions reinforcing employment earnings year-round and reduce seasonality.

- **Directed Marketing**

The eco-conscious traveler is targeted with successful campaigns of Coorg like "Explore Kodagu" that hones in on its "green" identity. Branding Ananthagiri Hills as an eco-friendly destination is another way to reach out sustainable tourists, and with the help of online and social media as well some influencers.

- **Alignment of funding and credit**

Coorg benefits from strong state government support, including infrastructure initiatives and public-private partnerships. For Ananthagiri Hills, fostering government collaboration, along with local community partnerships, will ensure that tourism development is both sustainable and inclusive.



Source: Telangana Tourism Development Corporation. (2023). Development Strategies for Ananthagiri Hills.

Graph 03 Explanation: This pie chart breaks down the proposed ₹100 crore budget for the development of tourism infrastructure in Ananthagiri Hills. It shows that the largest share (50%) is allocated to infrastructure development, followed by community empowerment initiatives (30%) and sustainable tourism initiatives (20%). This visual aid clearly communicates how funds should be distributed to ensure comprehensive development, addressing the key areas that can enable Ananthagiri Hills to reach its tourism potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANATHAGIRI HILLS

- 1. Build Basic Infrastructure:** Construct environmentally friendly lodging and improve highways. To increase accessibility, ₹100 crore should be set out over three years (Proposed Budget Analysis, 2023).
- 2. Empower Local Communities:** Encourage women-led homestays and start hospitality training programs for residents. These projects may be funded under the Telangana Tourism Skills Development Program (2023).
- 3. Encourage Sustainable Practices:** Create organic farm tours, eco-trails, and birdwatching locations while preserving biodiversity.
- 4. Marketing and Branding:** To draw eco-aware tourists, start a campaign like Coorg's "Explore Kodagu."

CONCLUSION

Coorg's transformation into a rural tourism hub demonstrates how strategic investments in infrastructure, community participation, and diversified attractions can drive sustainable development. For Ananthagiri Hills, addressing infrastructure gaps, empowering local communities, and implementing effective marketing strategies are essential. By leveraging its natural and cultural assets, Ananthagiri Hills can replicate Coorg's success and emerge

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