



Sports Tourism in Tamil Nadu: Problems and Opportunities

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Abstract

Sports tourism has emerged as one of the most rapidly expanding segments of the global tourism industry. It combines travel and leisure with active or passive participation in sporting activities. Tamil Nadu, a prominent cultural and historical destination in India, has witnessed a gradual rise in the popularity of sports-based travel. This paper examines the current state of sports tourism in Tamil Nadu, its opportunities, and the problems limiting its growth. The analysis highlights the state's potential to become a hub for sports tourism while emphasizing the infrastructural, financial, and policy-related challenges that need to be addressed.

Introduction

Tourism has historically been associated with cultural, religious, and heritage-based experiences. However, in recent decades, its scope has widened to include adventure, wellness, and sports. Among these, sports tourism has gained global significance due to the role of mega-events such as the Olympics, FIFA World Cup, and Commonwealth Games, which draw millions of spectators and participants.

In India, sports tourism is still in its developmental stage, but certain states have shown remarkable growth. Tamil Nadu, located in South India, is well known for its temples, monuments, hill stations, and beaches. In addition, it has developed modern sporting infrastructure and produced internationally renowned athletes. This dual advantage of cultural

heritage and sports facilities provides the state with a unique opportunity to expand its tourism profile into the domain of sports tourism.

Sports and Tourism: A Global and Local Perspective

Globally, sports tourism is recognized as a billion-dollar industry. Countries such as Australia, the United States, and Brazil have successfully combined sports with tourism, creating new employment opportunities, boosting infrastructure, and strengthening their economies. Sports tourism does not merely include watching or participating in events; it also encompasses related activities such as training camps, sports festivals, and adventure-based experiences.

In Tamil Nadu, sports tourism has gained visibility mainly through events hosted in Chennai, such as the Indian Premier League (IPL), Pro Kabaddi, and international tennis tournaments. Traditional sports, including kabaddi and jallikattu, also attract considerable local and international interest. Adventure sports such as surfing at Muttukkadu and scuba diving at Rameswaram further enhance the state's tourism appeal.

Objectives of the Study

The present paper is guided by the following objectives:

1. To define the concept and scope of sports tourism.
2. To examine the present state of sports tourism in Tamil Nadu.
3. To identify opportunities for sports-based tourism in the state.
4. To analyze the problems and challenges faced in this field.
5. To suggest strategies for the promotion and sustainable development of sports tourism.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Tamil Nadu as a case example, exploring its dual advantages of cultural richness and sporting potential. It considers both traditional and modern sports and their contribution to tourism. The paper further evaluates infrastructural gaps, financial constraints, and policy-related issues that hinder growth. Though sports tourism is a growing global discipline, academic research on its development in Tamil Nadu remains limited. This makes the present study both timely and significant.

Sports in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu offers a diverse range of sporting experiences. Traditional sports such as kabaddi, jallikattu (bull-taming), cockfighting, bullock cart racing, wrestling, kho-kho, and indigenous martial arts form an integral part of rural and cultural life. Alongside these, modern sports including cricket, hockey, football, tennis, badminton, athletics, motor racing, swimming, and volleyball enjoy popularity in urban centers. Adventure and leisure activities such as scuba diving at Rameswaram, surfing at Muttukkadu, trekking in the Nilgiris, and horse racing in Ooty further enhance Tamil Nadu's tourism profile.

The state has produced many sporting icons such as Viswanathan Anand in chess, Ravichandran Ashwin in cricket, and Dipika Pallikal in squash. Their international recognition has placed Tamil Nadu on the global sporting map, thereby adding to its tourism value.

Problems Facing Sports Tourism in Tamil Nadu

Despite its potential, sports tourism in Tamil Nadu is held back by several problems. The most pressing concern is the inadequacy of infrastructure. For example, in certain sports like hockey, players are forced to practice on mud grounds rather than on standard synthetic turf, which affects the quality of their training and competitive performance. Similarly, the availability of quality sports kits and equipment is limited. Many athletes still rely on outdated or poor-quality gear, which not only reduces efficiency but also hampers confidence on the field.

Another major challenge lies in the lack of sponsorship. Corporate support is heavily concentrated on cricket, while other sports receive very little financial encouragement. This results in unequal development across different games. Moreover, the facilities provided to players in terms of accommodation, transport, and nutrition remain far below international standards, discouraging participation in large-scale events.

The politics within sports associations in Tamil Nadu further complicates the issue. Internal conflicts, favoritism, and nepotism in team selection and administration damage the credibility of the system and reduce opportunities for genuine talent. Alongside this, media coverage is uneven. Cricket dominates television and print space, while other sports struggle to receive recognition. Finally, both government and private sector support remain limited, and the absence of strong policy frameworks or consistent initiatives has slowed down the overall growth of sports tourism in the state.

Opportunities for Sports Tourism in Tamil Nadu

In contrast to these problems, Tamil Nadu possesses significant opportunities for growth in sports tourism. The state has already proven its capability by hosting international events such as the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket matches, Pro Kabaddi tournaments, and tennis championships in Chennai. These events have placed Tamil Nadu on the global sporting calendar and demonstrate its ability to attract both domestic and international audiences.

The increasing involvement of corporates and film celebrities in sports has also enhanced visibility and created wider public interest. Educational institutions are playing a role as well, as schools and colleges are now promoting sports more actively. New coaching academies, fitness centers, and clubs have emerged, providing structured training and creating pathways for budding athletes.

Furthermore, the expansion of sports-related professions such as physiotherapy, sports nutrition, coaching, and event management highlights the potential of sports tourism to generate employment and strengthen the economy. Urban centers like Chennai are also witnessing a rise in city marathons and community sports festivals, which blend fitness, culture, and tourism. These events attract participants from across the country and abroad,

thereby adding to Tamil Nadu's profile as a sports tourism destination. Finally, the state enjoys a highly passionate and loyal fan base that supports and motivates players, creating the right atmosphere for the development of sports culture.

Findings

The study reveals that parents in Tamil Nadu are increasingly encouraging their children to participate in sports. However, this encouragement is largely directed toward cricket, which continues to dominate the sporting culture of the state. Other games, particularly those that are less commercialized, such as hockey, kabaddi, and athletics, receive comparatively less attention from families, institutions, and sponsors. This imbalance has created a sporting environment where only a few games flourish while several others struggle to survive.

Another important finding is the lack of adequate sponsorship for less popular sports. While cricket enjoys strong financial backing from both corporate and media sectors, other disciplines remain marginalized. This unequal allocation of resources restricts the growth and professionalization of a wide range of sports that could otherwise contribute significantly to tourism and cultural exchange.

The role of media emerges as a crucial factor in shaping the popularity of sports tourism. Cricket and football receive extensive coverage on television, digital platforms, and newspapers, thus increasing their visibility and commercial value. In contrast, sports like kho-kho, kabaddi (outside the Pro Kabaddi league), and volleyball receive very little coverage. As a result, they fail to attract both public interest and financial investment, despite their rich traditional and cultural roots in Tamil Nadu.

Finally, the study highlights the variation in sports preferences between rural and urban areas. In rural regions, traditional games such as kabaddi, volleyball, and kho-kho are more popular, reflecting cultural continuity and community-based participation. Urban centers, on the other hand, display a stronger preference for cricket, basketball, and tennis, influenced largely by media exposure and modern sporting infrastructure. This difference in sporting choices demonstrates the diversity of Tamil Nadu's sports culture but also calls for balanced promotion to ensure that both traditional and modern games are equally nurtured.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage, combined with its growing sporting profile, positions it uniquely to develop sports tourism as a significant industry. The state has already demonstrated its capability by successfully hosting national and international events. However, for Tamil Nadu to emerge as the "Sports Capital of India," it must address critical issues related to infrastructure, sponsorship, and government policy.

A collaborative effort involving the government, private sector, sports associations, and media is required to promote diverse sports and not limit attention to cricket alone. With comprehensive planning and investment, sports tourism can become a driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and international recognition for Tamil Nadu.

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