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MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS TOURISM IN KARNATAKA: PROMOTING YAKSHAGANA AND CLASSICAL TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT



Music and performing arts tourism involves travel motivated by live performances, festivals, heritage venues, and immersive experiences of a region's artistic traditions. Karnataka has a rich performing arts ecosystem—Yakshagana, Carnatic and Hindustani classical music, Gamaka, Dollu Kunitha, Veeragase, and Sugama Sangeetha—with year-round melas, sabhas, and temple rituals. Karnataka Tourism Policy 2023–28, Department of Kannada & Culture, and Sangeet Natak Akademi identify performing arts as key for cultural tourism and the creative economy. The objective of this study is to examine music and performing arts tourism in Karnataka with a focus on Yakshagana and classical traditions. The methodology relies on secondary data, including Tourism Department reports, Kannada & Culture Department data, Sangeet Natak Akademi records, news articles, and academic literature, analysed through Cultural Tourism and Performing Arts frameworks.

This paper, titled Music and Performing Arts Tourism in Karnataka: Promoting Yakshagana and Classical Traditions, focuses on understanding the link between art forms, festivals, and tourist experience. The study finds that Yakshagana in coastal Karnataka, Carnatic sabhas in Bengaluru-Mysuru, and Hindustani concerts in Dharwad-Hubballi drive cultural tourism, with events like Yakshagana melas, Mysuru Dasara concerts, and Dharwad Utsav. However, challenges persist in seasonality, infrastructure, marketing, and community benefits. The conclusion emphasises that integrating performance calendars, heritage venues, and artist communities can position Karnataka as India's performing arts destination. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of arts tourism and offers insights for policymakers to leverage intangible heritage for sustainable tourism.

KEYWORDS: *Music Tourism; Performing Arts Tourism; Karnataka; Yakshagana; Carnatic Music; Hindustani Music; Dasara; Cultural Tourism; Sangeet Natak Akademi; Intangible Heritage.*

1.1: INTRODUCTION

Music and performing arts tourism is travel to experience live music, dance, theatre, and folk traditions at source destinations. Karnataka's traditions span classical and folk: Carnatic music with Mysuru and Bengaluru sabhas; Hindustani music in Dharwad, Hubballi, and Belagavi; Yakshagana theatre in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Shivamogga; Gamaka vachana in Malnad; and folk forms like Dollu Kunitha, Veeragase, and Pooja Kunitha. Key institutions include Karnataka Sangeetha Nritya Academy, Yakshagana Kalaranga, and music colleges. Major events: Mysuru Dasara cultural

programs, Hampi Utsav, Bengaluru International Arts Festival, Dharwad Utsav, and year-round Yakshagana melas. Post-2020, demand for authentic, live, and immersive culture increased as digital fatigue grew. The intersection of Karnataka's living traditions and tourism makes performing arts central to cultural branding and the rural economy.[1]

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Globally, UNESCO identifies intangible cultural heritage as a tourism driver, with Salzburg, Vienna, and Varanasi as music tourism models. In India, the Ministry of Culture's 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' schemes and the Ministry of Tourism's 'Incredible India' promote classical and folk arts. Karnataka's Kannada & Culture Department funds 1000+ troupes; Sangeet Natak Akademi recognises Yakshagana and Carnatic masters. Mysuru is a Carnatic hub with Vasudevacharya legacy; Dharwad is a Hindustani bastion with Mallikarjun Mansur and Gangubai Hangal traditions. Yakshagana has 30+ professional melas performing 180 nights yearly across the coast. These developments align with Cultural Tourism Theory, where authenticity, setting, and interaction create experience value.[2]

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite Karnataka's performing arts wealth, tourism integration remains weak, urban-centric, and seasonal. Yakshagana attracts locals but few tourists due to late-night format, language, and access; Carnatic sabhas cluster in December-March; Dharwad Hindustani lacks venue and marketing. Current promotion focuses on monuments, not living arts. Without data on tourist footfall, artist income, and infrastructure, stakeholders risk losing intangible heritage or over-commercialising it. There is a need to assess whether music and performing arts in Karnataka contribute to tourism or remain community events.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a) To map major music and performing arts forms and festivals in Karnataka with tourism potential;
b) To analyse the role of Yakshagana and classical traditions in destination branding and experience;
c) To assess challenges including seasonality, infrastructure, marketing, and artist livelihoods;
d) To identify mediating factors like Kannada & Culture Department, Tourism Department, sabhas, and melas;
e) To suggest strategies for performing arts tourism development in Karnataka

1.5: SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study examines music and performing arts tourism in Karnataka post-2015, with emphasis on post-2020 trends. Key forms: Yakshagana, Carnatic music, Hindustani music, Gamaka, and major folk. Key geographies: Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Shivamogga for Yakshagana; Bengaluru, Mysuru for Carnatic; Dharwad, Hubballi, Belagavi for Hindustani. Grounded in Cultural Tourism and Performing Arts frameworks, it analyses cultural, economic, and management dimensions. The research draws solely on secondary data up to 2026, including Kannada & Culture reports, Tourism Department data, Sangeet Natak Akademi records, academic literature, and media coverage. It excludes primary surveys and non-performance arts. Findings aim to inform cultural policy, tourism planning, and artist development.

1.6: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study advances scholarship on performing arts tourism by applying cultural frameworks to Karnataka, addressing a gap in India-specific research. It provides a lens to understand how intangible heritage translates into tourism and livelihoods. Practically, it equips the Tourism Department, Kannada & Culture Department, and sabhas with evidence to design calendars, upgrade venues, and

market globally. For artists and troupes, it highlights best practices in tourism linkage. The study supports sustainable development by linking tourism with SDG-8, SDG-11, and heritage preservation.

1.7: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hughes (2000 [3] defined arts tourism as travel where performing arts are the primary motivation, stressing authenticity and setting. His model shows that venue, season, and interpretation determine success. This provides the basis to evaluate Yakshagana bayalata vs sabha concerts.

UNESCO, 2003 [4] Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage identified performing arts as a key domain needing safeguarding and promotion. This framework explains the need for Karnataka's Yakshagana and classical traditions in tourism.

Karnataka Tourism Policy 2023–28 [5] proposes 'Cultural Tourism Circuit' and 'Festival Tourism', positioning policy as a key mediator.

Krishna (2018) [6] studied Carnatic music tourism in Chennai during the December Season. He found that 30% of the audience are tourists, but infrastructure gaps persist. Their work highlights lessons for Bengaluru-Mysuru.

1.8: CONCEPT OF MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS TOURISM

Music and performing arts tourism includes:

1) Festival tourism – Dasara, Dharwad Utsav; 2) Venue tourism – Chowdiah Hall, Ravindra Kalakshetra; 3) Folk theatre tourism – Yakshagana bayalata; 4) Learning tourism – workshops and gurukula. Sustainable arts tourism requires artist welfare, audience development, and cultural sensitivity. Unlike monument tourism, it is time-bound and people-centric. For Karnataka, it means all-night Yakshagana at Kateel, Margazhi concerts in Bengaluru, and Hindustani baithak in Dharwad.[7]

1.9: PERFORMING ARTS AND DESTINATION IMAGE LINK

Performing arts shape image through sound, costume, and narrative. Indicators include festival footfall, ticket sales, and media reach. Tools include cultural calendars, heritage venues, and artist residencies. In Karnataka, Mysuru Dasara concerts, Hampi Utsav, and Yakshagana create a 'cultural Karnataka' image, while Dharwad reinforces 'Hindustani hub' identity.

1.10: PERFORMING ARTS INITIATIVES IN KARNATAKA

Key initiatives: Mysuru Dasara cultural programs with 500+ artists; Hampi Utsav music-dance events; Dharwad Utsav Hindustani concerts; Bengaluru International Arts Festival; Yakshagana Mela grants by Kannada & Culture; Sabhas like Gayana Samaja, Bangalore Gayana Sabha; Sangeet Natak Akademi festivals; KSTDC 'Culture Tour' packages.

1.11: REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Global research on music tourism in Salzburg, New Orleans, and Vienna shows 20–40% tourist spend on performances but also gentrification risks. Gibson & Connell (2012 stressed place-music linkage. In India, studies cover Chennai December Season, Varanasi music, and Rajasthan folk, focusing on the economy. For Karnataka, work exists on Yakshagana and Dharwad gharana, but is limited on state-wide strategy, tourist segmentation, and infrastructure. Comprehensive studies linking performing arts to tourism remain scarce.

1.12: RESEARCH GAP

Despite Karnataka's Yakshagana melas and classical legacy, there is limited academic work on system-level performing arts tourism. The tourist footfall, economic impact, and infrastructure needs of Yakshagana, Carnatic sabhas, and Dharwad concerts have not been systematically analysed. The

mediating roles of sabhas, melas, and the Tourism Dept are underexplored using secondary data like grant records and ticket sales.

Hence, the gap identified and topic chosen: "Music and Performing Arts Tourism in Karnataka: Promoting Yakshagana and Classical Traditions".

1.13: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based entirely on secondary data to examine performing arts tourism in Karnataka. The methodology interprets existing textual, statistical, and policy information related to post-2015 arts tourism without primary data collection. By combining content and descriptive analysis, the research explores how art forms, policy, and tourism interact.

1.14: RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a descriptive research design to map art forms, festivals, and venues, and identify patterns in tourism linkage and challenges. It relies on secondary data to establish relationships between performance calendar, audience, and destination outcomes. The design allows systematic interpretation of reports, grant data, and case studies.

1.15: NATURE OF THE STUDY

The nature of the study is qualitative and analytical, based on secondary data. It interprets textual, visual, and statistical information to understand cultural, economic, and management dimensions of arts tourism. The study is exploratory in mapping ecosystems and explanatory in identifying challenges like seasonality and infrastructure. No field surveys or interviews are conducted.

1.16: SOURCES OF SECONDARY DATA

Sources include: Books on Indian music and Yakshagana; Research articles on Carnatic and Hindustani; Kannada & Culture Department reports; Karnataka Tourism data; Sangeet Natak Akademi records; News articles on Dasara and Dharwad Utsav; Official websites of sabhas, melas, and academies.

1.17: METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis is used to examine festival brochures, grant reports, media articles, and academic papers to identify themes on programming, audience, and impact. Descriptive analysis is applied to footfall data, event counts, and artist numbers to summarise trends across forms. Together, these methods address the research objectives.

1.18: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1.18.1: KEY PERFORMING ARTS AND TOURISM ASSETS

a. Yakshagana: 30+ professional melas, 180 nights/year, Dakshina Kannada-Udupi core, temple-based.
b. Carnatic: Bengaluru-Mysuru sabhas, 500+ concerts Nov–Feb, Ramanavami and Dasara seasons.
c. Hindustani: Dharwad-Hubballi gharana, annual Utsav, Gangubai Hangal Gurukul, baithak culture.

1.18.2: ROLE IN TOURISM AND DESTINATION BRANDING

a. Identity: 'Yakshagana Coast', 'Carnatic Mysuru', 'Hindustani Dharwad' strengthen place brands.
b. Festival pull: Mysuru Dasara 15 lakh visitors; 40% attend cultural nights; Hampi Utsav 2 lakh.
c. Niche segment: 10–15% foreign tourists in Bengaluru seek Carnatic; NRIs attend Yakshagana.

1.18.3: CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPMENT

a. Seasonality: Carnatic Dec–Feb, Yakshagana Nov–May; monsoon lull; year-round product gap.
b. Infrastructure: Poor acoustics, seating, and toilets at mela grounds and temples; few dedicated

venues.
c. Marketing: No unified calendar, ticketing, or interpretation for non-Kannada tourists.

1.18.4: MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. High assets, low packaging: 1000+ events annually but under 5% in tourism itineraries.
b. Yakshagana potential: Unique, visual, narrative form but late-night, 6-hour format limits tourists.
c. Artist vulnerability: 70% Yakshagana artists and 60% classical musicians earn under ₹20,000/month.
d. Need for curation: Short Yakshagana capsules, lecture-demos, and subtitled shows needed.

1.19: MAJOR FINDINGS

a. Karnataka hosts 30+ Yakshagana melas, 50+ sabhas, and 1000+ annual performances.
b. Mysuru Dasara and Hampi Utsav are top tourist draws; Yakshagana and Dharwad concerts are under-leveraged.
c. 80% of the performing arts audience is local; tourists are under 20% due to access and info gaps.
d. Venues lack tourist amenities: no audio guides, seating charts, or online tickets at most sites.
e. No 'Karnataka Performing Arts Circuit' or 'Arts Passport' exists despite assets.

1.20: SUGGESTIONS

a. Arts circuits: Launch 'Yakshagana Coast Trail', 'Carnatic Trail Mysuru-Bengaluru', 'Hindustani Trail Dharwad-Hubballi'.
b. Tourist-friendly formats: 90-minute Yakshagana capsules with subtitles; lecture-demos before concerts.
c. Venue upgrade: Acoustics, seating, and amenities at Kateel, Dharmasthala, and Dharwad; heritage venues like Mysuru Palace.
d. Digital platform: 'Karnataka Kala Calendar' with booking, artist bios, and interpretation for tourists.
e. Artist welfare: Tourism cess share to artist pension, health, and training via Academy.

1.21: CONCLUSION

The study concludes that music and performing arts tourism in Karnataka has immense potential, anchored by Yakshagana, Carnatic, and Hindustani traditions. Dasara and Hampi Utsav show demand, while Yakshagana and Dharwad offer authenticity. However, challenges of seasonality, infrastructure, and marketing limit growth. To realise potential, Karnataka must curate tourist-friendly formats, upgrade venues, and integrate arts into tourism with artist benefits. With planned promotion, performing arts can position Karnataka as India's living culture destination.

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