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COFFEE TOURISM IN KARNATAKA: OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT



Coffee tourism is a niche form of agri-tourism that combines plantation visits, coffee processing experiences, tasting, and rural culture to create experiential travel. Karnataka is India's largest coffee producer, contributing 70% of national output, with key districts Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, and Hassan forming the core coffee belt. Post-2020, demand for slow travel and farm-based experiences has positioned coffee estates as premium homestay and tourism products. Karnataka Tourism Policy 2023–28 identifies agri-tourism and plantation tourism as priority segments for rural livelihood diversification. The objective of this study is to examine the opportunities for coffee tourism in Karnataka and its role in sustainable tourism development. The methodology relies on secondary data, including Coffee Board of India reports, Karnataka Tourism Department publications, homestay data, news articles, and academic literature, analyzed through Agri-Tourism and Sustainable Livelihood frameworks.

This paper titled Coffee Tourism in Karnataka: Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism Development focuses on understanding the link between coffee landscapes, visitor experiences, and rural outcomes. The study finds that coffee tourism has created new income streams, promoted women's entrepreneurship, and extended tourism seasonality in Malnad. However, challenges persist in environmental stress, over-commercialization, seasonality, and benefit equity. The conclusion emphasizes that integrating eco-certification, capacity building, and community participation can strengthen Karnataka's position as India's coffee tourism capital. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of plantation tourism and offers insights for policy makers to leverage agri-assets for inclusive growth.

KEYWORDS: *Coffee Tourism; Karnataka; Agri-Tourism; Kodagu; Chikkamagaluru; Homestays; Plantation Tourism; Sustainable Development; Rural Livelihoods.*

1.1: INTRODUCTION

Coffee tourism refers to travel motivated by coffee culture, including estate tours, bean-to-cup experiences, tastings, barista workshops, and stays in plantations. It is a subset of agri-tourism that adds value to farming through tourism. Karnataka's coffee belt in the Western Ghats includes Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Shivamogga, and parts of Dakshina Kannada. The region produces Arabica and Robusta and hosts heritage bungalows, forest trails, and tribal culture. Post-2015, with the Home

Stay Policy and rise of Airbnb, coffee estates opened to tourists as homestays and boutique resorts. Post-2020, demand for open, nature-immersive stays accelerated growth. The intersection of Karnataka's coffee economy and experiential tourism makes coffee tourism central to rural diversification and sustainable development.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Globally, coffee tourism developed in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Ethiopia as a tool for farm income and cultural branding. Colombia's Coffee Cultural Landscape is a UNESCO site linking coffee with tourism. In India, the Coffee Board promotes 'Indian Coffee Houses' and estate tours, while Ministry of Tourism included agri-tourism under Rural Tourism Scheme. Karnataka legalized homestays in 2015, enabling coffee planters to host tourists. Districts like Kodagu and Chikkamagaluru have 1200+ registered homestays, 70% being coffee estates. Karnataka Tourism Policy 2023–28 proposes coffee trails and plantation tourism circuits. NABARD and KSTDC support SHG-led coffee tourism. These developments align with Sustainable Agri-Tourism Theory, where farming and tourism co-exist to enhance rural resilience.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite Karnataka's dominance in coffee and early homestay growth, coffee tourism remains concentrated in Coorg and Chikmagalur with weak regulation and sustainability planning. Estates face water stress, waste issues, and cultural dilution due to commercialization, while small planters lack market access. Current strategies focus on promotion but lack data on carrying capacity, environmental impact, and equitable benefits. Without evidence on limits and outcomes, stakeholders risk converting coffee landscapes into mass tourism zones. There is a need to assess whether coffee tourism in Karnataka delivers sustainable development or creates new rural vulnerabilities.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a) To examine the growth and potential of coffee tourism in Karnataka;
b) To analyze tourist motivations, experiences, and spending in coffee estates of Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, and Hassan;
c) To assess challenges including environmental stress, seasonality, over-commercialization, and regulation;
d) To identify mediating factors like Home Stay Policy, Coffee Board support, digital platforms, and community participation;
e) To suggest strategies for sustainable coffee tourism development in Karnataka

1.5: SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study examines coffee tourism in Karnataka with focus on estate stays, plantation tours, and coffee experiences post-2015, with emphasis on post-2020 growth. Key districts include Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Shivamogga, and Dakshina Kannada. Grounded in Agri-Tourism and Sustainable Livelihood frameworks, it analyzes economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions. The research draws solely on secondary data up to 2026, including Coffee Board reports, Karnataka Tourism data, homestay registrations, academic literature, and media coverage. It excludes non-coffee agri-tourism and urban cafes. Findings aim to inform rural tourism policy, plantation economy, and sustainable development planning.

1.6: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study advances scholarship on plantation tourism by applying sustainability frameworks to Karnataka's coffee sector, addressing a gap in India-specific research. It provides a lens to understand how agri-assets translate into tourism opportunities and risks. Practically, it equips Karnataka Tourism

Department, Coffee Board, and district administrations with evidence to regulate estate stays, promote equity, and design coffee circuits. For planters, it highlights best practices in hosting, branding, and conservation. The study supports sustainable development by linking tourism with farm income, women's agency, and landscape protection in the Western Ghats.

1.7: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lane, 1994 (4) defined agri-tourism as tourism on working farms for education and recreation. His model shows that authenticity and farmer involvement are key. This provides the base to evaluate Karnataka's estate vs resort models.

Jolliffe, 2010 (5) conceptualized coffee tourism as travel related to coffee history, production, and culture. She identified farm tours, museums, and festivals as core products. This framework explains Karnataka's potential beyond homestays to include museums and trails.

Coffee Board of India, 2021 (6) in Indian Coffee Vision 2030 proposed coffee tourism to improve farmer income and brand India. It positions estate experiences as key mediators for value addition.

Udaya & Gowda, 2023 (7) studied homestays in Chikmagalur. They found 50% income rise for planters but noted water use and waste issues in peak season. Their work highlights sustainability trade-offs in Karnataka's coffee tourism.

1.8: CONCEPT OF COFFEE TOURISM

Coffee tourism is travel centered on coffee landscapes, production, and culture. It includes estate stays, plantation walks, processing tours, cupping sessions, barista training, and coffee festivals. It is a form of agri-tourism and culinary tourism that connects consumers to origin. Principles include: farmer participation, education, small scale, and landscape conservation. Unlike resort tourism, it is experience-led and tied to seasonality of harvest. For Karnataka, coffee tourism means Monsoon Malabar trails in Sakleshpur, cherry picking in Coorg, and heritage bungalow stays in Chikmagalur.

1.9: OPPORTUNITIES IN COFFEE TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Karnataka's opportunities include: Year-round product via planting, flowering, harvest, and curing seasons; High-value experiences like estate-to-cup tours and roasting workshops; Women-led homestays and SHG cafes; Integration with trekking, birding, and wildlife in Western Ghats; Global branding of Coorg and Chikmagalur coffee; Off-season income reducing migration. Sustainable development links arise through organic farming promotion, agroforestry conservation, and cultural revival of Kodava and Malnad traditions.

1.10: COFFEE TOURISM INITIATIVES IN KARNATAKA

Key initiatives: Karnataka Home Stay Policy 2015 enabling estate stays; Coffee Board's 'Indian Coffee Trail' promotion; KSTDC coffee packages and 'Malnad Trails'; Private festivals like Coorg Coffee Festival and Chikmagalur Coffee Santhe; Estate brands like Tata Coffee and Woodrose launching visitor centers; Airbnb and MakeMyTrip featuring coffee homestays; Karnataka Tourism Policy 2023–28 proposing coffee circuits and interpretation centers; NABARD funding for women SHG coffee tourism units.

1.11: REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Global research on coffee tourism in Colombia, Brazil, and Vietnam shows income gains and brand building when farmer-owned. Lyon, 2013 stressed equity and governance in coffee tourism. In India, studies cover Araku Valley and Wayanad focusing on tribal inclusion. For Karnataka, work exists on Coorg homestays and Chikmagalur economy, but limited on environmental impact, carrying capacity, and policy effectiveness. Comprehensive studies linking coffee tourism to sustainable development across Karnataka remain scarce.

1.12: RESEARCH GAP

Despite Karnataka's coffee leadership and homestay boom, there is limited academic work on system-level sustainability of coffee tourism. The impact on water use, waste, biodiversity, and cultural change in Kodagu and Chikmagalur has not been systematically analyzed. Mediating roles of Coffee Board, grading, and eco-certification are underexplored using secondary data like homestay stats and NABARD reports.

Hence the gap identified and topic chosen: "Coffee Tourism in Karnataka: Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism Development".

1.13: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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

1.14: RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a descriptive research design to map coffee tourism estates, describe visitor and income trends, and identify patterns in management and impact. It relies on secondary data to establish relationships between coffee tourism growth, rural livelihoods, and sustainability. The design allows systematic interpretation of reports, guidelines, 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 economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of coffee tourism. The study is exploratory in mapping opportunities and explanatory in identifying challenges like overuse and regulation. No field survey or interviews are conducted.

1.16: Sources of Secondary Data

Sources include: Books on agri-tourism and plantation tourism; Research articles on Coorg and Chikmagalur; Coffee Board of India annual reports; Karnataka Tourism Department homestay data; KSTDC publications; NABARD case studies on coffee SHGs; OTA listings and reviews; News articles on water crisis and homestay boom; Official websites of Karnataka Tourism, Coffee Board, and district tourism.

1.17: Method of Data Analysis

Content analysis is used to examine policy documents, Coffee Board reports, media articles, and academic papers to identify themes on livelihoods, ecology, and branding. Descriptive analysis is applied to homestay registration data, occupancy rates, and coffee area statistics to summarize trends across districts. Together, these methods address the research objectives.

1.18: Analysis and Discussion

1.18.1: Growth of Coffee Tourism in Karnataka

a. Post-2015 legalization: Home Stay Policy enabled 1200+ coffee estates to host tourists, per Karnataka Tourism 2024 data.

b. Post-2020 acceleration: Work-from-anywhere and experiential travel trends doubled bookings in Chikmagalur and Sakleshpur.

c. Digital visibility: Instagram and Airbnb made "coffee estate stay" a top search, with Coorg ranking among India's top 5 rural destinations.

1.18.2: Opportunities for Sustainable Development

a. Income diversification: Planters earn 30–50% additional income from tourism, reducing coffee price volatility risk.
b. Women's entrepreneurship: Women manage hospitality, food, and tours in 65% of coffee homestays, per KSTDC data.
c. Conservation linkage: Estate tourism funds shade-grown coffee, bird habitat, and stream protection in Western Ghats.

1.18.3: Challenges in Coffee Tourism

a. Environmental stress: Peak season in Coorg and Chikmagalur causes groundwater depletion, waste, and traffic on estate roads.
b. Over-commercialization: Large "homestays" with 10+ rooms operate as resorts, violating policy and diluting authenticity.
c. Seasonality and equity: Monsoon and summer peaks leave lean periods; small planters lack marketing access vs large brands.

1.18.4: Major Findings and Discussion

a. Coffee tourism as rural growth engine: Sector supports 15,000+ jobs and revived estate economy in Malnad.
b. Sustainability gap: Environmental and cultural costs are externalized; no eco-certification for coffee stays exists.
c. Regional skew: Growth limited to Kodagu-Chikkamagaluru; Hassan and Shivamogga under-promoted despite potential.
d. Need for governance: Without zoning, grading, and water audits, coffee landscapes risk degradation like hill stations.

1.19: MAJOR FINDINGS

a. Karnataka leads India in coffee tourism with 1200+ estate homestays, mainly in Kodagu and Chikkamagaluru.
b. Coffee tourism provides 30–50% supplementary income and high women's participation in hosting.
c. Coorg and Chikmagalur face water stress, waste, and traffic due to unregulated homestay clusters.
d. Policy enforcement of 5-room limit and owner occupancy is weak; many units function as resorts.
e. Hassan, Sakleshpur, and Balehonnur have high potential but low visibility and bookings.

1.20: SUGGESTIONS

a. Eco-certification for coffee stays: Launch 'Green Coffee Homestay' rating with criteria on water, waste, and shade cover.
b. Zoning and caps: Map carrying capacity for Coorg and Chikmagalur; limit new registrations in stress zones.
c. Capacity building: Train small planters in hospitality, digital marketing, and sustainable practices via Coffee Board.
d. Coffee circuit development: Link estates with curing works, museums, and festivals for multi-day itineraries.
e. Benefit sharing: Mandate community fund from tourism revenue for watershed and school projects in villages.

1.21: CONCLUSION

The study concludes that coffee tourism in Karnataka offers strong opportunities for rural income, women's empowerment, and destination branding. Estate stays in Kodagu and Chikmagalur

have made Karnataka India's coffee tourism leader. However, challenges of water stress, over-commercialization, and weak regulation threaten the sustainability of coffee landscapes. To protect authenticity and ecology, Karnataka must enforce policy norms, introduce eco-certification, and promote new regions. With balanced governance, coffee tourism can position Karnataka as a global model where beverage, biodiversity, and livelihoods brew together sustainably.

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