

Report on Bharat Darshan (Study Tour)

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The following report is the learning of our experiences of the events, visited places and activities of seven days study tour of Kerala organized for all the officer trainees from 28th April 2024 to 04th May 2024 with the aim to understand the implementation of government policies, understand the ground reality and to know how our India is full of diversity. We were in a group of 61 OTs and 01 faculty member and there was five group leaders among OTs for the smooth and hassle free study tour.

The tour was of seven days and following are the brief learning of our study tour :-

Day 1

On 28th April at 06:10 hours, our group of 62 members boarded flight 6E 5278 of Indigo from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad to Thiruvananthapuram. We reached Thiruvananthapuram International Airport at 07:45 hours. The weather was hot and humid and the temperature was around 35°C.

i. Padmanabhaswamy temple:

The first point in our itinerary was Padmanabhaswamy temple. The temple has a dress code for men and women. Women are required to wear sarees, MundumNeriyathum (set-mundu), skirt and blouse, or half-saree. Young girls below the age of 12 may wear gowns. Men are similarly required to wear mundu or dhoti and bare their torso. Dhotis are easily available for rent at the entrance. We wore the attire and proceeded towards temple. The temple is located in the East fort of Trivandrum. After entering east fort, there is pond, padmatheertham on the right hand side of the path and Kuthirmalika Palace on left hand side of the path. The temple is built in an intricate fusion of the Kerala style and the Dravidian style of architecture, featuring high walls and a 16th century gopuram. The gopuram of temple is 100 foot(30 m) high, it has 7-tier and it is built in

pandyan style. The temple has 4 entrance- kizakke nada, padinjare nada, vadakke nada and thekke nada" (means East,west,north&south). But the main entrance is Kizakke nada (East Entrance). The temple has a corridor with 365 and one-quarter sculptured granite-stone pillars with elaborate carvings. This corridor extends from the eastern side into the sanctum sanctorum. As it was Sunday, the temple had a lot of rush and the queue was very long. The queue runs through the corridor and then into the sanctum sanctorum. By the time we reached sanctum sanctorum, it was time for madhyanya Pooja or , so we had to wait for another 45 minutes for darshan. In the Grabhagriha, Padmanabha reclines on the serpent. The deity is visible through three doors – the visage of the reclining Padmanabha and Siva Linga underneath his hand is seen through the first door; Sridevi and Bhrigu Muni in Katusarkara, Brahma seated on a lotus emanating from the deity's navel, hence the name, "Padmanabha", gold abhishekamoorthies of Padmanabha, Sridevi and Bhudevi, and silver utsavamoothi of Padmanabha through the second door; the deity's feet, and Bhudevi and Markandeya Muni in Katusarkara through the third door. Inside the Temple, there are two other important shrines, Thekkedom and Thiruvambadi, for the Deities, UgraNarasimha and Krishna Swami respectively. After having darshan we went to our buses. The time was around 1pm and we proceeded towards our hotel.

ii. Veli village

Everyone was feeling full of energy after having lunch and taking some rest. In the evening we proceeded towards veli village. Veli tourist village lies where the veli lake meets the Arabian sea. It provides unique boating and picnicking opportunities. We returned from veli village by around 8pm and after having our dinner we took a good sleep.

Day 2

i. Kovalam beach

In the early morning we went to kovalam beach to see sunrise. There we had the opportunity to meet some local fisherman. Fishing is one of the major business in Kerala. The catch consists of King Fish, Red Snappers, Pomfrets, shrimps, etc. They sell their lot mostly to local market.

ii. Alleppey(venice of the east)

At around 9am we departed from Trivandrum to alleppey. We reached our destination at 2pm. Alleppey is famous for its canals, backwaters, beaches and lagoons. We had booked a backwater cruise to see the scenic man made islands and beautiful sights of coconut fringed backwaters and paddy fields. All the staff of the cruiseboat was local and they acted as our guide for the backwaters journey. The cruise started from pamba river and went uptovembanad lake. Total distance covered was around 15km (to and fro). The path traversed by us is part of national waterway 3. The scope of road and railways development in alleppey is limited and that's why the development of waterway in this area has proved to be a boon for traditional industries such as coir, cashew and fishing. It is the first national waterway in the country with 24 hour navigation facilities along the entire stretch.

The economy of alleppey is based on paddy farming, tourism and coir industry. Alleppey is part of Kuttanad region, this region has the lowest altitude in India, and is one of the few places in the world where farming is carried on around 1.2 to 3.0 metres below sea level. The region is known as the rice bowl of Kerala and it is also the part of second largest Ramsar site in India. To stop the saltwater intrusion into the Kuttanad, a 1252m long saltwater barrier, Thanneermukkom has been built on Vembanad lake.

Besides its backwaters, alleppey is also famous for its coir industry. Coir is extracted from the outer husk of coconut and is used to make ropes, twine, brooms and brushes, doormats, etc.

After disembarking from the boat, we went to our hotel and later in the evening we went to some coir shops to see the coir products.

Day 3

- i. At around 8am we proceeded towards Thekkady to visit Periyar National Park. People-oriented and park-centered community-based ecotourism is the hallmark of Periyar Tiger Reserve. These programmes are conducted by local people responsible for the surveillance of the vulnerable parts of the reserve. Community-based and protection-oriented ecotourism programmes (CBET) were initiated in PTR during the IEDP. These programmes were developed to ensure livelihood security and to reduce negative dependency on forests. Tickets for boating at Periyar lake were already booked by us. On reaching Thekkady, a bus of national park took us from our stop to Periyar National Park. There were 4 double decker boats waiting for the tourists at the lake. The boat journey was of 1 hour and during this boat journey we witnessed herd of deer, elephants, wild goats and wild buffaloes. There was no sight of tiger. On inquiring forest official about this, he said that it is a rare sight and in his 24 years of service, he has witnessed tiger only 12 times. The reason for this is that 925sq km of Periyar National Park is home to only 40 tigers. The forests of Periyar tiger reserve are pristine and unaffected from all outside disturbances, even after accommodating thousands of tourists every year. This is because of the management effectiveness of periyar tiger reserve. It also bagged first prize in the management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) of tiger reserves in India for the year 2022, released by ministry of environment, forest and climate change.
- ii. From Periyar tiger reserve, we proceeded to our next destination Munnar and reached there by 11pm. On the way from Thekkady to Munnar we witnessed many tea, spice and rubber plantations.

Day 4

- i. Eravikulam National Park

In the morning we departed for Eravikulam national park which was 15km from our hotel. It is situated in the Kannan Devan Hills of the southern western ghats. The wildlife park has an area of 97 sq. km. and it is the first national park in Kerala. It is divided into three regions- the core area, the buffer area and the tourism area. Visitors are allowed only to the

tourism area. After reaching main entrance of tourism area, a bus of Kerala forest and wildlife department took us to the starting point of Kurinji trail. The magnificent view of beautiful tea plantations on our way was a sight to behold. The trek from to kurinji is of one hour and the on the way one can witness herds of nilgiritahr, the endangered mountain goat, for which Eraviculam is a natural habitat. The national park has the highest density and largest population of NilgiriTahr. The trekking journey also provides a mesmerizing view of the largest stretch of undisturbed montane shola-grassland eco system in the western ghats. Anamudy (2695m), the highest peak south of Himalayas, is also located within the park.

At the ending of the trek is the highly admired plant species *strobiliantheskunthiana*, which is locally known as Neelakurinji. Neelakurinji is an endemic species of Western Ghats and it is under threat because of being plundered from the grasslands of High Ranges by ignorant/berserk people. It blooms once in 12 years. It last bloom in 2018 and hence it will bloom again in 2030. After spending some time on the top, we came back to the starting point of the trek and visited “story of the park”. it shows brief history of the park and the flora and fauna which are found in the park with special attention to niligiritahr.

Day 5

- i. In the morning we visited Mattupetty dam. Mattupetty is more than just a water storage facility. The water body that forms as a result of this gravity dam is often termed as Mattupetty lake. Mattupetty lake is a perennial lake which never dries up even in the summers. the dam is an important source of electricity and the lake hosts various water based recreational activities which adds to the tourism. The water of mattupetty lake is also used for irrigation purpose in the nearby fields.
- ii. Tata tea museum
Tea has played an integral part in the history of Munnar. Tata tea museum has photographs and machineries, which chronicle the

journey of tea in the area. The museum set up at the Nallathanni Estate of Tata Tea ensures that the legacy of those who worked hard to ensure the tea plantations survived this long is recognised publicly. We got to watch the transition from the rudimentary tea roller to the modern fully automated tea factory. Various stages of tea processing can be seen, which includes the making of black tea. There was a sundial, placed on a granite block, which was made in 1913 by the Art Industrial School at Nazareth, Tamil Nadu. It has other attractions like the 'Pelton Wheel' used in the power generation plant in the 1920s, tea roller and a rail engine wheel of the Kundale Valley Light Railway. A demonstration room for tea tasting is another attraction where we came across different varieties of tea. We tasted some of the most exotic varieties of tea available around the world here.

iii. **Tea estates**

The tea museum is situated in the Nallathanni Estate, which is owned by Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company Private Limited. Some of the plantations of KDHP are open to public. We visited some of the tea estates and saw how the tea workers plucked tea leaves. For plucking the pluckers take first two leaves and a bud. Plucking is a labour intensive business and hand plucking is economical than machine plucking.

Day 6

In the Kochi we spent 2 days. On first day at 8am we left for Cherai Beach.

i. **Cherai Beach**

ii. **Fort Kochi**

After visiting Cherai Beach, we moved towards Fort Kochi. Fort Kochi is a neighbourhood of Cochin city. Fort Kochi takes its name from Fort Manuel of Cochin. It was the first European Fort on Indian soil and was controlled by the Portugese East Indies. The European architecture of many buildings and structures can still be seen in

Fort Kochi. Various cultures blend at Fort Kochi. More than 30 communities co-exist here and more than 16 languages are spoken in the town. The influence of various European colonies can be seen here.eg-

- The portugese influence-it can be seen in Fort Manuel of Cochin and St. Francis Church(one of the oldest churches in India). Both these structures are extremely beautiful.
- The Dutch influence-it can be found in Dutch cemetery near St. Francis Church and Bolgatty palace.
- The British influence-it can be seen at Jew town and Princess Street.

iii. Mattancherry Palace

This palace is popularly known as the Dutch Palace. It is a quadrangular structure built in Nalkettu style, the traditional Kerala style of architecture, with a courtyard in the middle. Certain elements of architecture, as for example the nature of its arches and the proportion of its chambers are indicative of European influence in basic Nalukettu style. There is large number of murals on the walls of the palace, executed in the traditions of Hindu temple art, which are religious, decorative and stylized.

Conclusion

Here we end our bharadarshan study tour in which we learnt a lot related to practical learning and government policies. I hope this will help in shaping our career .