



Study Tour (Bharat Darshan)

FOR
ASSISTANT SECTION OFFICERS OF CSS

STUDY TOUR KERALA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

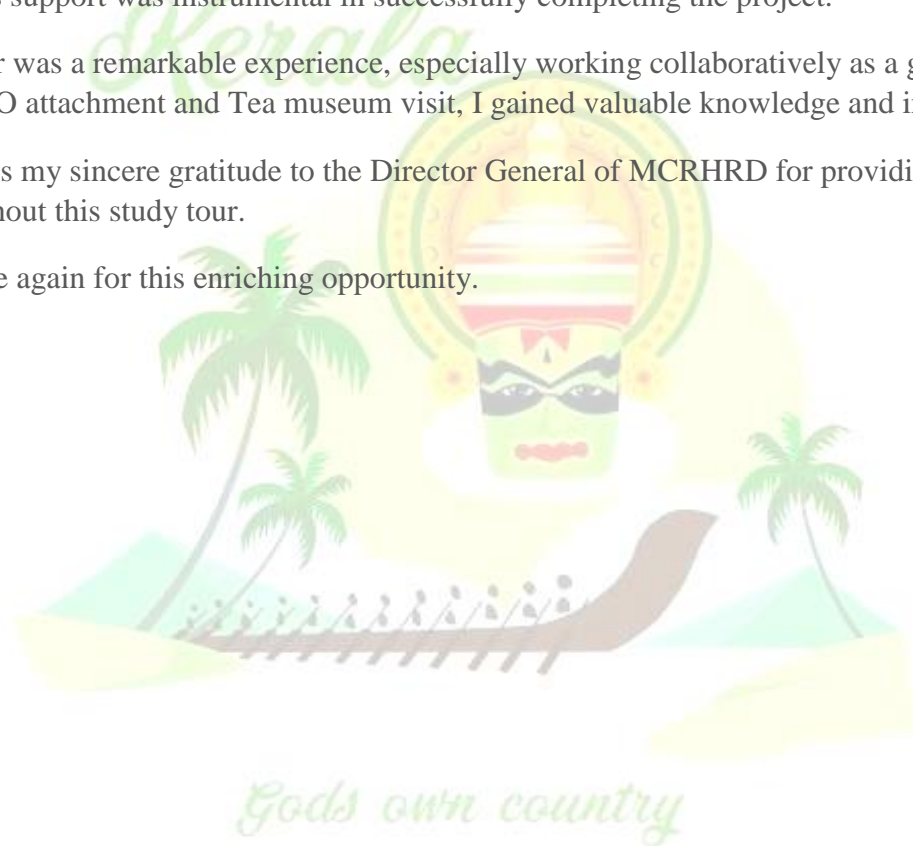
I extend my heartfelt gratitude for granting me the unique opportunity to participate in the mandatory training program at the MCRHRD Institute of Telangana. This experience has been invaluable, and I appreciate the support provided by Smt. Usha Rani, Course Director at MCRHRD.

I am also deeply thankful to Mr. Saka Venkateswara Rao, Senior Faculty and Bharat Darshan Coordinator, for his unwavering guidance, constant supervision, and valuable insights related to our project. His support was instrumental in successfully completing the project.

The Kerala tour was a remarkable experience, especially working collaboratively as a group. During the NGO attachment and Tea museum visit, I gained valuable knowledge and insights.

Lastly, I express my sincere gratitude to the Director General of MCRHRD for providing essential support throughout this study tour.

Thank you once again for this enriching opportunity.



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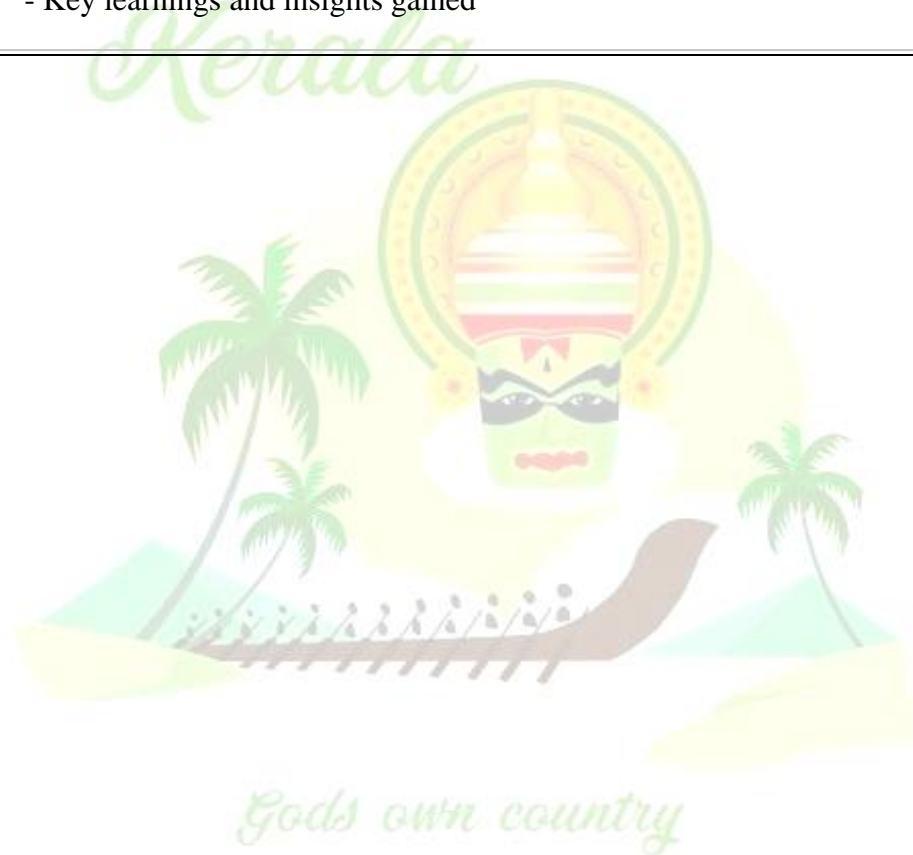
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Objectives of the Tour:

As part of the mandatory ISTM Phase-1 Foundation Training Programme for Assistant Section Officers (ASOs) of the 2023 Batch, a one-week Bharat Darshan was organized in Kerala from April 28, 2024, to May 4, 2024. The tour was conducted under the guidance of Mr. Saka Venkateswara Rao, Senior Faculty (FTP).

A total of 61 participants from different Ministries took part in this enriching Training Programme. The study tour served several key objectives:

1. **Exposure to NGO Research and Development Work:** Trainees had the opportunity to explore the research and development initiatives undertaken by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This exposure allowed them to understand the impact of such work on society.
2. **Familiarization with India's Cultural Heritage and Arts:** The tour aimed to acquaint the trainees with India's rich cultural heritage, including its art forms, traditions, and historical significance. Visits to cultural sites and interactions with local artists contributed to this objective.
3. **Development of Essential Skills:** The study tour emphasized the development of essential skills, including:
 - **Team Spirit:** Trainees learned to collaborate effectively as a team.
 - **Time Management:** Managing schedules efficiently was a crucial aspect.
 - **Crisis Management:** Adapting to unexpected situations and handling crises were valuable lessons.

Overall, the Bharat Darshan study tour provided a holistic learning experience, combining practical exposure, cultural immersion, and skill development.

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Day 1 (28th April 2024): Hyderabad - Trivandrum

We left Hyderabad at 3:15 AM and reached Trivandrum at 7:45 AM. 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, Mundum Neriyathum (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). 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. 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 Bhriгу Muni in Katusarkara, Brahma seated on a lotus emanating from the deity's navel, hence the name, "Padmanabha", gold abhisheka moorthies of Padmanabha, Sridevi and Bhudevi, and silver utsava moorthi of Padmanabha through the second door; the deity's feet, and Bhudevi and Markandeya Muni in Katusarkara through the third door. After having darshan we went to our buses. The time was around 1pm and we proceeded towards our hotel.



Pic- Visit to Padamanabhswamy Temple in traditional attire

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 Here are some glimpse of the Kovalam beach that we captured



Pic- Mesmerising view of Kovalam beach



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On Day 2 (April 29th, 2024)

We headed to Alleppey where we embarked on a mesmerizing houseboat cruise through the picturesque backwaters, savouring a delightful traditional Kerala lunch along the way. Witnessing skilled artisans in action, we gained insights into the thriving coir industry. Later in the evening, we paid a visit to the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom before settling into our hotel.

Alleppey:

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 cruise boat was local and they acted as our guide for the backwaters journey. The cruise started from Pamba river and went upto Vembanad lake.



Pic- Alleppey Backwaters

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 meters 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.



Pic- Group photo in cruise boat in Alleppet Backwaters

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-centred 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.



Pic- Periyar Lake

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Pic:-Boating in Periyar Tiger Reserve

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 at Spice garden and getting to know about various ayurvedic plants used for treatment of different kind of diseases.



Pic- Learning about spices and ayurvedic medicines

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.



Pic- Eravikulam National Park

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 nilgiri tahr, the endangered mountain goat, for which Eravikulam is a natural habitat. The national park has the highest density and largest population of Nilgiri Tahr. 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 *strobilanthes kunthiana*, which is locally known as Neelakurinji.



Pic- Kurunji Garden

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 niligiri tahr.

Day 5

i. Mattupetty Dam:

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.



Pic- 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. We tasted some of the most exotic varieties of tea available around the world here.



Pic- Tea estate, Munnar

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:

We arrived at Cherai Beach, Kerala, in morning excited for a day of water sports and fun in the sun. Our group of friends and colleagues eagerly tried our hands at parasailing, jet-skiing, and kayaking, feeling the rush of adrenaline as we sped across the waves. After a thrilling day of water sports, we relaxed on the beach, watching the sunset and sharing stories of our adventures. It was an unforgettable experience, and we left Cherai Beach with memories to last a lifetime



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Pic:- Fun at 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 Portuguese 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.
- Chinese Fish Net



Pic- Chinese Fishing Nets

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.



Day7 Theruvoram NGO:

We visited Theruvoram NGO in Kochi, which is like a shining light of hope for the community. I wanted to learn more about how they help people and make a difference in society.

Discovering Theruvoram's Heart:

When I stepped into Theruvoram's office, I felt welcomed and could sense their passion for helping others. They aim to make the world fairer and more inclusive for everyone.

A Variety of Programs:

I was amazed by all the things Theruvoram does. They run programs for education, healthcare, jobs, and protecting the environment. One of their best programs helps kids from poor families get a good education, breaking the cycle of poverty.

Changing Lives, Changing Communities:

Meeting people who have benefited from Theruvoram's help was touching. Women are starting their own businesses, and young people are finding their voices through art. Theruvoram gives people the tools they need to succeed and be proud of who they are. Leaving Theruvoram, I felt inspired by their stories and their commitment to making the world a better place. In a world where things aren't always fair, organizations like Theruvoram show us that change is possible. I'm going to carry their values with me and do my part to help others, just like they do.

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Pic- Visit to Theruvoram NGO

Learnings from the trip:

- We gained a deeper understanding of Kerala's culture, history, and natural beauty.
- We learned about the state's initiatives in conservation, tea industry, and coir production.
- We developed team spirit and time management skills through group activities and tight schedules.
- We experienced the local cuisine and traditional arts, such as Kalaripattu.

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Conclusion:

The study tour enriched our understanding of Kerala's culture, history, and natural beauty. We explored beaches, Alleppey backwaters, Munnar's tea gardens, Eravikulam National Park's lush forests, and the serenity of Periyar Lake. Interacting with locals added value to this vibrant experience.

