

# HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES IN KERALA

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## *Abstract*

Development of Lodging and other accommodation facilities is a major by-product of the progress of tourism in an area. Therefore Accommodation continues to be the single largest sub unit of Tourism Industry. This paper is a study of the development of accommodation facilities for tourists in Kerala over the decades. They have developed from *satroms* and *oottupuras* to hotels, resorts, homestays, houseboats, etc. If providing accommodation to the travellers was a matter of charity in the earliest times, it has now become a big industry. During the British Raj, Malabar region had many travellers' Bungalows for visitors. *Grihasthali*, a Scheme initiated by the Government of Kerala for the protection of ancient heritage buildings, also has helped to promote accommodation facilities in the State. Being the capital of Ayurveda treatments, Kerala has many Ayurveda resorts also. Houseboats, an innovative accommodation cum travel facility in Kerala, are in service in the backwaters of Kerala since the early 1990's. Accommodation facilities have developed gradually in the State, over these decades, and this development has helped the overall growth of Tourism Industry.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Accommodation, Hotels, Ayurvedic Resorts, Grihasthali

## I. Introduction

Infrastructure determines the competitiveness of a destination. Tourism infrastructure of a destination is constituted by the physical elements, which are designed and erected to cater for its visitors. Some elements are indispensable, while some others are complimentary and optional. The major infrastructural inputs, from the point of view of tourism, comprise of

1. Accessibility
2. Accommodation and
3. Amenities.[1]

Enhancement of the competitiveness of these supporting sectors and the strategic coordination among all the contestants are pre-requisites of tourism promotion.[2]

Accommodation and other facilities complement the attractions. They play a key role and is very basic to tourist destinations. In its definition of a 'tourist', the World Tourism Organisation has stipulated that, in order to qualify as a tourist, one must spend at least one night in the destination visited.[3] This condition presupposes the availability of some kind of accommodation at destination. A major share of the tourist expenditure falls on Accommodation. The demand for Accommodation can be met by a variety of facilities such as hotels, homestays and resorts. Hotels are important components of the tourism product. They contribute to the overall tourism experience through the standards of facilities and services offered by them. The growth of the hotel industry in any place is an index of the tourism development in particular and of economic development of that region in general.

The range and types of accommodation required are quite varied always and have undergone substantial changes in recent times. The use of and demand for boarding houses and small private hotels have declined over the time. Larger hotel networks, especially chains of hotels have a fair share of holiday trade, especially in big metropolitan areas and popular spots. The demand for 'boutique type of accommodation' is also on the rise, which gives a cosy experience to the customers in elegant and high amenity settings of a small hotel.[4] In recent years, some changes have reflected in the type of accommodation. There has been an increasing demand for more non-traditional and informal types of accommodation. Another new trend in accommodation is holiday villages and, in recent years, there has been an escalation in the popularity of such accommodation units. [5]

Accommodation facilities for travellers have progressed a lot in Kerala over the centuries. Hospitality has been a matter of great pride and charity for the people of Kerala. Sharing from the traditional core Indian value of 'Athithi Devo Bhava', they give the highest honour to the guest. [6] *Satrom* or small rest houses were available at many places, for the use of travellers.[7] They were supplemented by victualing centres like *Oottupuras* and *Conjee<sup>1</sup> Houses* [8], [9]. During summer season, water or buttermilk was served to the weary wayfarers. There were a large number of Public Dining Halls known as

'Annadaana Satrom' or 'Oottupura' in ancient Kerala. Most of these endowments were purely charitable and some of them, quasi-religious, in nature. Besides accommodation, travellers were given food and other requisites, absolutely free of cost. *Agrasaala* or *Oottupura* of Padmanabhaswamy Temple at Thiruvananthapuram catered to nearly 1500 people, at a time [10]. Choultries<sup>ii</sup>[11] existed at temples in South Canara region of Northern Kerala until recent times. Census Report of Kasargod District in 1981 testified the existence of a choultry at Sree Bhadra Narasimha Temple in Manjeswaram Taluk. The District Gazetteers of Kannur also speaks of a well-endowed public choultry in Santhana Gopala Temple at Kodlamogaru in Kasargod Taluk [12]. The earlier was run by Gowda Saraswatha Brahmins, while the latter was established in 1899 by the Bunt community. Pilgrims as well as wayfarers were provided free meals there.

By the end of the nineteenth century, most of these endowments became relics of the past and their role was taken over by other establishments like Travellers' Bungalows, Rest Houses and Camp Sheds. In Travancore and Cochin, they were run by the respective Royal Governments and in Malabar, by the British Government of Madras. In 1920, there were thirty-seven Travellers' Bungalows at various points in Travancore [13]. There were Camp Sheds also, which were primarily reserved for the Government Officials, travelling on public purposes. C. A. Innes, the Collector of Malabar in 1906, reported that there were 130 Travellers' Bungalows and Rest Houses in the District. [14] He further reported that it was a great improvement from forty-four Bungalows in 1844. Thirty- seven choultries were in existence, managed by Local Boards, for native travellers.

## II. Hotels and Resorts

The hotel industry has gained importance in Kerala recently. It was a demand-driven growth and it developed subsequent to the promotion of tourism in the State. Most of the hotels in Kerala were established in the post-1980 period, especially after 1986. The data relating to the number of hotels, number of rooms and number of beds prior to this period were not available even with the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala. The Halcyon Palace at Kovalam was built in the 1930's by the Royal Family of Travancore, as a summer resort [15]. Kovalam Palace Hotel started functioning under the management of ITDC from October, 1970.

At the end of 1970s, Kerala had only one destination, Kovalam and the number of star-classified hotels in the State was two. After the declaration of tourism as an industry in 1986 and particularly after the economic reforms in 1991, the number boosted so fast. By 1998, the number of hotels boosted very much to have four heritage hotels, one five-star deluxe, two five-star, six four-star, fifteen three-star, thirty-two two-star and twenty single star hotels with a total number of 3201 rooms [16]. Multiplication combined with product differentiation. From simple accommodation units, it diversified into Resorts, Homestays, Houseboats and Tree-top Nests.

### III. Homestays

The genesis of homestays in Kerala can be traced back to the Bed and Breakfast (B&B) [17]<sup>iii</sup> type of accommodation, which existed in one form or other from ancient times. The immediate predecessor of homestays was the Paying Guest Scheme of Kerala Tourism, which was first introduced in 1987 and revamped in 1993 and 1996 [19]. The present scheme of 'homestays' was approved by the Government in January 1998. Homestay is an example of family business in tourism. It is a more comprehensive concept that provides many supplementary experiences to tourists in addition to accommodation in a homely environment. As the name indicates, homestays are 'staying in a home' with a family, where the tourists will get opportunity to mingle with the people, their culture, and lifestyle. The owner of house provides both food and accommodation. It gives tourists, an opportunity to stay with a local family and experience their customs, traditions and cuisine. For both host and guest, this system gives financial benefits. A resident of Kerala staying in his or her own house and is willing to set apart minimum one room (two beds) for tourists, is eligible to get an approval for running a homestay. Though homestays were in existence in Kerala from 1990s itself, a scheme for recognition and classification was evolved in 2006 only.

### IV. Serviced Villas

A Serviced Villa is an independent and furnished home preferably built in the traditional Kerala architectural style and making available a minimum of one room and maximum of six rooms for guests. A well-equipped kitchen with a cook, who is well-versed in the Kerala cuisine, is a pre-requisite of serviced villas. This scheme increases options for accommodation in the State. It aims to provide comfortable stay facilities of standardized high quality to tourists and supplement the availability of accommodation in various tourist destinations.

### V. Grihasthali

Heritage has three different aspects with regard to tourism. They are 1) Preservation, which means the retention of heritage, 2) Conservation, which means restoration of heritage and 3) Exploitation, which means making economic value out of heritage [20]. *Grihasthali* is a well thought-out scheme to preserve, conserve and exploit our traditional architecture by converting them into excellent accommodation units with modern facilities. It was an innovative project of the Department to rejuvenate heritage buildings in the State [21]. The first Tourism Policy of the State had envisaged such a scheme for the conservation of traditional homes called '*tharavadu*' of Kerala and to market them as accommodation units for the tourists [22]. It aimed at increased participation of private entrepreneurs in the accommodation sector. Therefore, the Department of Tourism designed an exclusive package of incentives and financial assistance to the projects, which were approved. The financial assistance proposed was arranged in collaboration with the Kerala Financial Corporation and various nationalised banks. A

minimum of fifty years of antiquity is essential for becoming eligible under Grihasthali Project. The scheme was launched in 1998 and up to 2013 only six units got approved under the project [23].

## VI. Houseboats

A Houseboat is a small cottage, erected on a large wooden cargo boat, using traditional methods and ethnic materials [24]. They are unique tourism products in the backwaters of Kerala. These kinds of boats were not an invention purely for the tourist purpose. They were in service in the backwaters of Kerala, for transporting cargo as well as passengers. They were known in local language as '*kettuvallam*'.<sup>iv</sup> With the popularization of modern means of transportation such as rail and road, they lost demand [25]. Therefore, this kind of a transformation was necessitated by the historical circumstances, as a measure of adaptation to the changing scenario. It was in the early 1990's that the idea of houseboats came up, for organizing backwater cruises of longer duration for the pleasure of tourists [24]. The first transformed *kettuvallam* was launched in 1993 at Kayamkulam [26]. In 2007, there were 321 houseboats all over Kerala. The number got more than doubled, to reach 732 by 2015, with Alappuzha District having the highest number of them, 634 [27]. The Department of Tourism has a scheme of classification for the houseboats, and based on the facilities provided, they are categorized into Gold Star and Silver Star.

## VII. Ayurveda Health Resorts

Travelling to Kerala for seeking Ayurveda treatments has become popular trend in Kerala Tourism. Kerala has succeeded in making *Ayurveda*, a chemical catalyst for the development of tourism [28]. But however, the success stories of Ayurveda Tourism in Kerala come from private initiatives only. All governmental efforts have turned failures so far. A project for establishing an Ayurveda Resort was initiated in 1990 at Thalakkulathur in Kozhikode, but it remains undone even after nearly three decades, due to lack of sufficient funds [29]. An effort to obtain Central assistance was also unsuccessful. An Ayurveda Hospital, with special care to Children and Adolescents is functioning there. Another ambitious project to establish a Global Ayurveda Village at Thonnakkal in Thiruvananthapuram is also mid-way, even after six years. This project is aimed at making Kerala 'the World Capital of Ayurveda'. The Village is proposed to have sub-schemes for Research, Treatment and Tourism. The agency for running this project is the Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation [30]. Though the Corporation has been reputed for the establishment of industrial infrastructure in the State, this project is lagging for many years.

## VIII. Conclusion

Accommodation facilities have developed in Kerala, along with the development of tourism. It has diversified from simple hotels to resorts, homestays, houseboats, etc. Ayurvedic Centres also have developed as accommodation facilities, over the course of time. The scheme for rejuvenation and protection of traditional homes in Kerala, named *Grihasthali* also has made

a great impact on the scene of accommodation in Kerala. Being the capital of Ayurveda treatments, Kerala has many Ayurveda resorts also. Houseboats, an innovative accommodation cum travel facility in Kerala, are in service in the backwaters of Kerala since the early 1990's. Accommodation facilities have developed gradually in the State, over these decades, and this development has helped the overall growth of Tourism Industry.

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- [31] *Kettuvallam* can be literally translated into 'boat with knots', and it is called so because the wooden planks used for the erection of the boat are joined together with coir ropes, tied in knots. During the entire assemblage of the boat, not a single nail is used.