

SITHERI HILLS – EMERGING TOURIST DESTINATION IN HARUR, DHARMAPURI

Abstract

Sitheri Hills, located in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu, is an emerging tourist destination known for its beautiful hill station, green cover, and pleasant climate. However, the findings reveal that the number of tourists visiting the area is relatively low, with poor road conditions, inadequate food options, and limited shopping opportunities. Suggestions include the creation of a dedicated website, improved transportation facilities, the establishment of home stays, attractive travel packages, and the development of basic infrastructure. Emphasizing cleanliness, hygiene, and environmental sustainability is crucial, along with marketing campaigns, safety measures, and a visitor code of behaviour. Overall, efforts are needed to enhance the tourism experience and promote Sitheri Hills as a desirable destination.

Keywords: Sitheri Hills, Importance, Tourism Element, Tourist's Perception.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sitheri hill is the part of Eastern Ghats in Shervarayan hills range and located in Pappireddipatti block in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu. It is located at a distance of 26 km from Harur and 85 Km from Salem through Vazhapadi, Thumbal, Belur and Idayapatti.. From Dharmapuri one has to travel 42 km to reach the Harur. It is a small beautiful hill station, comes around the series of hills between Dharmapuri and Yercaud having good green cover, cool climate and pleasant place for tourists. The altitude of the Sitheri hills hill station is 3600 approximately. From Harur, tourists has travel through villages like Valli Madurai, Keeraipatti, Tholthukki . This route has good agricultural lands and looks green and pleasant. This area is cultivated with coconut trees, Turmeric, Banana, Samanthi flower, Paddy, Arecanut and Groundnut. Sitheri hills has sixty two villages and more than 15000 population. All the villages are not connected with good roads and infrastructure facilities are good.



II. IMPORTANCE OF SITHERI HILLS

At the bottom of the hill, the village Valli Madurai has Dam having 5000 ac command area. The Dam is surrounded by greenery hill and the looks very attractive. There is Park in the Dam area, which was constructed to attract tourists, but the present condition is poorly maintained. Tourists can spend one hour in the dam site. The boating facilities are not available in the Dam. From here one has to travel one hour to reach Sitheri Hills. On the way to Sitheri Hills, we can see water flowing streams, small waterfalls and water harvesting structures like check Dams and Percolation pond. The water in the waterfalls are looks like muddy, but taste of the water is good. The area is cultivated by Samai, Thinai, Varagu, Sorgham and Kambu. These millets are available for tourists at less price in the local market. Seasonal fruits like Guava, Jack fruits, are cultivated in this area. Mamparai village has a beautiful natural scenes and area is cultivated with Paddy, Jack fruit, and coconut trees. There is view point next to the village, tourists can enjoy the sun rise and sun set. From Mamparai, at a distance of 10 km, a beautiful greenery village called Notchikuttai is located and in the morning time before 8am, the hills are covered with mist. It is an important spot for photographic lovers. Hill honey is available in this village and the colour of the honey looks like orange. Next is Alagur checkampatti village and it has major check dam having depth of

30 feet and tourists has reach this beautiful spot through 1 km trekking from main road. It is a good adventure tourism spot. From Sitheri bus stand, at distance of three kilometre, there is Park cum gymnastic centre. From the park, tourists can view the Kalvarayan hills and a Check Dam nearby. Venkata Ramasamy Temple is another tourist attraction in Sitheri Village and every year, they celebrate festival, which attracts more number of tourists and visitors from surrounding villages.

III. TOURISM ELEMENT OF SITHERI HILLS

Table 1: Tourism Elements

Sl.No.	Essentials	Detail
1	Place	Dharmapuri Dt / Tamil Nadu.
2	Coordinates	12 ⁰ 08'00'' N 78 ⁰ 45' 00''E
3	Weather	Moderate humid sub-tropical climate
4	Elevation	3600 feet
5	Temperature	12 to 19 degree Celsius in winter and in summer 30 -40
6	Average annual rainfall	900 mm
7	Tourism Season	October to March
8	Off season	June to September
9	Tourism places to visit	Waterfall/ Viewpoints / Forest/Temples.
10	Vegetation	Medicinal plants, Silver oak, Jack fruit tree, Maize, and millets.
11	Fauna	Disappeared due to severe habitat fragmentation. Only monkeys and Kattu Erumai are seen.
12	Avifauna	NA
13	Specialisms	Herbal plants
14	Lodging	No hotels and lodges for the tourists.
15	Food facilities	Moderate to Good. Only source is village resstaaurants.
16	Connecting road	Moderate to good.
17	Car Parking	Available
18	Availability of tourist Guides	Not Available
19	Hospitality of people in Villages	Moderate to good
20	Shop facilities	Millets and honey are available in local Market
22	Total extent of place	400 sq.km
23	Number of inhabitants	Around twenty thousand
24	Nearest Accessible Town	Dharmapuri 70 km and Harur 26 km
25	Air port	Salem / Bangalore
26	Nearby Railway station	Available – Dharmapuri and Morappur
27	Bus facilities	Buses available from Harur in the morning and evening. Rental Cars available at Harur.

IV. TOURISM ATTRACTION AT SITHERI HILLS

Table 2: Tourism Attractions

Sl.No.	Places of interest	Place detail
1	Sitheri hills waterfalls	Waterfalls
2	Mamparai and Sitheri view point	viewpoint
3	Venkat Ramasamy Temple at Sitheri	Temple
4	Check Dam and Pond	Water body.

A beautiful waterfalls is located in Sitheri hills and the height of the waterfall is 20 feet and water flow at full level during the rainy season. From main road one has to trek for 30 minutes to reach the waterfalls. The water is crystal clear, tasty and there is pond type place is available at the bottom of the waterfalls, which enable the tourists to take bath safely. Mamparai and Sitheri viewpoint is beautiful place, from there visitors can view the villages at the bottom of the hills and sunset is worth watching from this point. A small temple at Sitheri village is Venkat Ramasamy temple and festival is celebrated every year which attracts people from surrounding villages in the Sitheri hills.

V. TOURIST'S PERCEPTION ABOUT SITHERI HILLS

Sitheri hills is located in Reserve Forest area. It is filled up with greenish forest species including jack fruit trees, Bananas, Coconut and Rice filed makes everyone feel pleasant. The waterfalls, Viewpoints, Temples, are the main attractions of this place. At present the tourists are few thousands only. Most of the tourists are day visitors, because there is no accommodation facilities available in Sitheri hills. A research study was undertaken among the tourists to better understand their perceptions. The research focuses on tourism-related components and visitor ideas for better management of the area as a whole.

1. Tourist Profile: The most crucial demographic factors for creating effective tourism development plans and strategies are the characteristics of domestic tourists. This will aid in improving the effectiveness of marketing decisions. This covers demographic information like sex, age, hometown, educational attainment, income, and occupation. It also takes into consideration factors like being accompanied, the reason for the visit, the manner of travel, the type of lodging, and other factors. It aids the tourism planner in implementing the best marketing plans to draw more visitors to Sitheri hills Hill Station.

Sex: 84% of the 50 tourists questioned are men, with the remaining 16% being women.

Table 3: Sex

Sex	No. of Tourists	%
Male	42	84
Female	08	16
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

Men make up the majority of vacationers, the research claims. Men are allegedly more interested in hill tourism than women are, and there aren't many transportation choices.

- 2. Age of the Travelers:** Age is a significant consideration when determining the best kind of tourism product to be created. Due to the fact that visitors of different ages frequently have distinct needs, age is a very helpful variable. 84 percent of the 50 visitors questioned are between the ages of 20 and 40, 12 percent are between the ages of 41 and 50, and the remaining 4 percent are between the ages of 51 and 60.

Table 4: Age

Age	No. of Tourists	%
20- 40	42	84
41-50	6	12
51-60	2	04
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

The majority of the tourists, it can be seen from the table, are between the ages of 20 and 40.

- 3. Native District:** The researcher tries to determine where the tourists are from. Seventy six percent of the 50 tourists surveyed are from Dharmapuri. 14% came from Salem, and the rest came from other Tamil Nadu regions.

Table 5: Native District

Native District	Number Of Tourists	Percentage
Dharmapuri	38	76
Salem	07	14
Others	05	10
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

It can be seen from the data that the bulk of visitors are from the Dharmapuri district.

- 4. Education:** Of the 50 visitors, 68 are college graduates, 16 are high school students, and the remaining 16 are from different educational backgrounds, such as diploma and certificate programmers.

Table 6: Educational Status of the Tourists

Particulars	Number of Patients	Percentage
High School	08	16
Graduation	34	68
Others	08	16
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data.

According to the report, graduates make up the bulk of travelers (68%). It seems that people with more education are more interested in travelling.

- 5. Employment:** The level of quality and cost of the tourism services offered are determined by a person's employment, which in turn affects their financial condition. According to the study's research of tourist vocations, 12% of tourists work in business, 80% are employed privately, and the remaining 8% of visitors belong to a variety of groups, including elderly people, stay-at-home mothers, farmers, etc.

Table 7: Occupation

Particulars	No. of Tourists	Percentage
Business	06	12
Private employees	40	80
Others	04	08
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data.

From the table, it can be seen that the majority of tourists work for private companies.

- 6. Monthly Tourist Revenue:** One of the motivating reasons that encourages people to visit to vacation areas is their ability to earn money while there. Higher income groups regularly travel to the destination with large spending budgets. 22 percent of the 50 visitors surveyed have monthly incomes between Rs 20,000 and Rs 30,000. The median monthly income for visitors is between Rs. 3001 and Rs. 40000, with the remaining 24% earning more than Rs. 40000.

Table 8: Monthly Income of the Tourists

Income in Rs	Number of Tourists	Percentage
20000-30000	11	22
30001-40000	27	54
>40000	12	24
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

According to the report, the majority of visitors to Sitheri hills Hill Station earn between Rs. 30001 and Rs. 40000 per month.

- 7. Accompany:** The researcher tries to learn more about the individual who follows the tourists. Visitors are accompanied by friends 82% of the time, family 08% of them, and mixed groups the rest of the them.

Table 9: Accompanied Persons

Particulars	Number of Tourists	Percentage
Friends	41	82
Family members	04	08

Mixed group	05	10
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

According to the table, most of the visitors are in buddy groups.

- 8. Visitor Intentions:** The researcher identifies the visitor intentions, which are crucial for the growth of tourism. Of the 50 visitors questioned, 92% are travelling just for pleasure, 6% are travelling for both business and pleasure, and the remaining tourists are visiting friends and family.

Table 10: Purpose of Visit

Particulars	Number Of Tourists	Percentage
Tourism Only	46	92
Tourism And Business	03	06
Visit to friends & relatives	01	02
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

According to the report, the vast majority (92%) of visitors are there solely for leisure.

- 9. Number of visits:** Data on the quantity of tourists visiting Sitheri hills were obtained for the study. Approximately 96% of visitors to Sitheri hills have only been there once, 2% have been there twice, and the remaining 4% have been more than twice.

Table 11: Number of Visit

Number Of Times	Number Of Tourists	Percentage
One	48	96
Two	01	02
Above Two	01	02
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

According to the report, the majority of visitors to Sitheri hills were first-timers.

- 10. Transportation:** The study examines the form of transportation utilized by tourists travelling to Sitheri hills. Of the 50 tourists surveyed, 86% travelled to Sitheri hills by their own vehicle, 8% by bus, and the remaining 6% by rental vehicle.

Table 12: Mode of Transport

Number Of Times	Number Of Tourists	Percentage
Own vehicle	43	86
Bus	04	08
Rental vehicle	03	06
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

According to the report, the majority of visitors utilized their own vehicles to travel to Sitheri hills. Tourism growth and promotion are greatly aided by transportation.

11. Accommodations: There is no accommodation facilities available in Sitheri hills. Some tourists prefer to stay in their friends and relatives house. There is greater possibility for starting Home stay in this hill area. The Home stay will help the tourists to stay in the destination and cost of accommodation will be comparatively cheaper. Government or Tourism department can initiate community run Home stay for the benefit of local people. By effectively implementing Home stay in Sitheri hill, the local people economic status will be improved.

12. Travel destinations visited: The presence of tourist attractions at the location is crucial for increasing the number of visitors. The study examines the tourist destinations. Every tourist has been to the lake and the parks. Of the 50 tourists questioned, 20% visited a waterfall, 85% went to a viewpoint, 15% went to a place of worship, and 30% went to Park.

Table 13: Tourism Places Visited

Place	Yes	No
Waterfall	20	80
View points	85	15
Religious places	15	85
Park	30	70

Source: Primary data

The majority of the tourists, it can be seen from the table, have visited waterfalls, coffee plantations, and overlooks.

13. Regarding the tourist facilities: Transportation, parking, security, lodging, food courts, restrooms near tourist attractions, and friendly locals are just a few of the tourist amenities. The amenities listed above need to be improved. There are few eateries, and little local awareness of the significance of tourism. Local transit is not offered. The roads are moderate and it needs to be improved, especially roads leads to tourist attractions.

VI. FINDINGS

- There are fewer than 5,000 tourists who visit Sitheri hills annually. The majority of visitors are trekking or friend groups.
- The roads that go to various locations are in poor shape.
- The food served in local restaurants is of poor quality.
- There aren't many places to shop where you can buy local goods like honey, millets etc..
- Improved bathing facilities are required near the waterfall.
- There is relatively little transportation frequency from Harur.
- Males make up the bulk of the domestic visitors to Sitheri hills, and they tend to be younger visitors, between the ages of 20 and 40. According to the report, the majority of tourists are from the Dharmapuri region and its nearby areas.

- Graduates make up the majority of the visitors. It seems that people with more education are more interested in travelling.
- The vast majority of visitors are business travellers.
- According to the report, the majority of tourists who visited had monthly incomes more than Rs. 40000.
- The most of the tourists (64%) are accompanied by friends.
- The most of visitors (92% of them) merely come for leisure.
- According to the report, most of the tourists arrived at their destination using their own vehicle.
- The majority of visitors went to viewpoints, and park.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

- There must to be a dedicated website for Sitheri hills that provides facts on food and drink offerings, tourist attractions and their prices, as well as customer reviews.
- To help tourists have a good tourism strategy, a specialised information facility should be built at the bus stops in Dharmapuri, Morappur, Harur and on the access point from the highway.
- Bus transportation facilities has to be improved to attract more number of tourists.
- Homestay should started by tourism department or local administration to provide lodging and food facilities for the tourists.
- Attractive travel packages for visitors and hikers should be created in order to lengthen the stay.
- The development of Sitheri hills basic infrastructure, including its roads, power, water, sewage, and other services and amenities including lodging, dining establishments, recreational venues, and retail establishments, is intended to draw tourists. The local community should be included in the planning and execution of the development projects.
- In Sitheri hills, local restaurants, bus stops, and other tourist attractions should all be kept clean and hygienic.
- Toilet facilities must be available for visitors visiting tourist destinations.
- Implementing a ban on the use of plastic and polythene bags in Sitheri hills should happen right away, because it puts the environment in peril.
- To familiarise travellers with the location, advertisement hoardings must be erected in Tamil Nadu's major cities and towns.
- Weekend package excursions for tourists from potential sites must be planned by Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation.
- The municipal government should start advertising campaigns to draw in more domestic visitors.
- Assure the tourists' safety and security and let them know what safeguards they should take.
- With the assistance of the regional administration and the forest department, create and distribute a visitor code of behaviour.
- Tourists should contribute to preserving the area's tranquilly, as well as its wildlife and animals.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Because of the area's moderate climate, superb nature, and top-notch attractions, hill tourism is growing more widespread today. Sitheri Hills, the only mini-hill station in Tamil Nadu, is a popular and developing tourism destination with a lot of promise. It is one of the state's minor hill stations. Because of the area's pleasant climate, breath-taking views, and waterfalls, more visitors come here every year. By improving the essential tourism infrastructure, developing a successful tourism strategy, and including the local population in tourism promotion and development activities, the number of tourists can be boosted even further. The neighbourhood will thus gain more economic clout. A study on tourists' impressions of the hill station was conducted in order to better understand the different sorts of visitors to Sitheri Hills and their perceptions of the infrastructure amenities, transportation costs, culinary selections, and hygienic conditions. Recommendations for a more effective tourism industry have been offered in light of the research's findings. The Sitheri Hills' revenues can be raised by efficiently putting the study's recommendations into practise.

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