

Problems and Prospects of Heritage Tourism in Kerala; with Special Reference to Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur.

Dr. Shiney C N

Associate Professor, Research Department of Commerce, MES Asmabi College, P Vemballur

Abstract: *This article highlights the problems and prospects of heritage tourism in Kerala with special reference to Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur. Kerala popularly known as the 'God's own country' has emerged as the most attained tourist destinations in the Country. The tourism and travel industry comprises 10 percent of Kerala's GDP and contributes around 23.5 percent to the total employment in the state. Heritage tourism is a branch of tourism oriented towards the cultural heritage of the location where tourism is occurring. The state's tourism agenda promotes ecologically sustained tourism, which focuses on the local culture and personal growth of the local population. Cheraman Juma Masjid is one of the famous heritage spots in Kerala attracting large number of tourists. It is believed to be the first mosque in India and it is one of the oldest in the World. The study revealed that Masjid is well maintained and protected even if the construction is still continuing. Tourists visited the destination for relaxation and development of tourism destination improved the standard of living of the host community also.*

Keywords: Tourism, Cheraman Juma Masjid, Expectation, Satisfaction, Sustainable tourism Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry is one of the major revenue earning industry in the world. In 2024, International tourism receipts reached USD 1.4 trillion in 2023 and India's direct contribution to GDP was 9.1% in 2023. In 2023, India ranks 22nd positions for the world tourists' arrival and foreign tourists' arrival in India reached at 9.52 million in 2023.

Kerala is a popular tourism destination for both domestic and international visitors. Kerala's travel industry model is acclaimed as one of the most changed travel industry models with the private parties driving the travel industry advancement and the state is going to be about as a facilitator rather than a controller. The travel industry comprises 10 percent of Kerala's GDP, and contributes around 23.5 percent to the total employment in the state.

Heritage tourism refers to the act of traveling to experience the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of a destination. It involves visiting places that have significant historical, cultural, or natural importance, such as historical sites, museums, monuments, and landscapes. Heritage tourism aims to explore and appreciate the unique traditions, customs, and artifacts that define a particular region or community.

Kerala is a popular destination for heritage tourism due to its rich cultural history, diverse traditions, and stunning landscapes. Key heritage sites in Kerala includes Fort Kochi and Mattancherry, Jew Town and Synagogue, Kochi Spice Market, Kerala Backwaters and Houseboats, Kerala Dance Forms, Traditional Architecture, Historical Temples, Cultural and Arts Festivals. Heritage tourism in Kerala, therefore, provides a holistic experience for travellers looking to explore the state's cultural roots, historical landmarks, and traditional practices.

Cheraman Juma Masjid, located in Kodungallur in the Thrissur district of Kerala, is a significant cultural and historical site. It holds the distinction of being considered one of the oldest mosques in the Indian subcontinent and is associated with an intriguing blend of history and legends. Here's a brief overview of Cheraman Juma Masjid in the context of heritage tourism. Cheraman Juma Masjid is believed to have been built in 629 AD, making it one of the oldest mosques

in the Indian subcontinent. According to popular legend, it was built by Malik Deenar, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, and later renovated in the 11th century.

Architectural Features:

The mosque showcases a mix of traditional Kerala and Arabian architectural styles. The wooden structure, sloping roof, and intricate woodwork are characteristic of Kerala's architectural heritage. The mosque underwent renovations over the centuries, incorporating diverse architectural influences.

Religious and Cultural Heritage:

Cheraman Juma Masjid holds immense religious significance for the Muslim community in Kerala and beyond. It is considered a symbol of communal harmony, reflecting Kerala's long history of religious diversity and cultural integration.

Legend of Cheraman Perumal:

One of the fascinating aspects associated with the mosque is the legend of Cheraman Perumal, a king who is said to have embraced Islam after witnessing miraculous signs. He is believed to have divided his kingdom and embarked on a sea journey to meet the Prophet Muhammad. Before his death, he left instructions to build a mosque, which eventually became Cheraman Juma Masjid.

Tourist Attractions Nearby:

Cheraman Juma Masjid is located in Kodungallur, a town with a rich history dating back to ancient times. Tourists visiting the mosque can explore other historical sites in the vicinity, such as the Bhagavathi Temple and Thiruvanchikulam Mahadeva Temple.

Cultural Festivals:

The mosque becomes a focal point during cultural and religious festivals, attracting visitors interested in experiencing the local traditions and celebrations.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Devi (2019) emphasizes the richness of Kerala's cultural and heritage assets and how they contribute to *heritage tourism growth*, highlighting temples, traditional festivals, architectural styles, and settlement history.

Nithya (2017) provides a descriptive and analytical survey on heritage tourism in Kerala, identifying specific challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, policy gaps, marketing deficiencies, and management issues affecting heritage tourism growth. The study also discusses prospects like improved planning, stakeholder involvement, and conservation measures that could enhance heritage tourism.

Shaharban (2025) in *Tourism Development in Kerala: Trends, Challenges, and Prospects* highlights both overarching tourism challenges (including heritage sites) and potential paths forward. Kerala's tourism has seen both economic success and sustainability challenges, such as environmental degradation, lack of coordinated planning, and need for equitable stakeholder benefits. While not exclusively heritage tourism, this text situates heritage within broader sector challenges and opportunities

Suresh Kumar & Jaseela Thanikkad (2024), focused on cultural tourism, highlights how heritage and cultural products form part of Kerala's tourism structure and the related challenges in tourism development.

Muhammed Anas et al. (2025), This systematic review identifies sustainability challenges (e.g., environmental degradation, overtourism, governance issues) that are also relevant for heritage tourism planning and management in Kerala.

Pandalam Palace Project Report (2016) at *Pandalam Palace* provides empirical insights on local community perceptions and infrastructural challenges around a heritage site in Kerala.

Muziris Heritage Project (Kerala Tourism) – Official project documentation highlights heritage conservation prospects and the challenges faced in restoration, adaptive reuse, and tourism integration.

Statement of the Problem

Cheraman Juma Masjid, with its historical legacy, architectural beauty, and religious significance, serves as a captivating destination for heritage tourism in Kerala. Visitors can appreciate not only the mosque's architectural splendor but also

the cultural and historical tapestry of the region. At Cheraman Juma Masjid, issues relating to conservation, visitor amenities, accessibility, documentation, and awareness among domestic and international tourists continue to hinder its growth as a major heritage tourism destination. Moreover, the absence of integrated planning between tourism authorities, heritage conservation agencies, and local stakeholders has resulted in underutilization of the site's tourism potential.

At the same time, the site offers considerable prospects for sustainable heritage tourism through improved conservation practices, better promotional strategies, heritage education, and inclusive community-based tourism initiatives. Understanding both the problems and prospects associated with heritage tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid is therefore essential for framing effective policies and strategies that balance heritage preservation with tourism development.

In this context, the present study seeks to examine the key problems affecting heritage tourism development in Kerala with special reference to Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur, and to explore the prospects for enhancing its role as a significant heritage tourism destination in a sustainable and culturally sensitive manner. As the number of tourists visiting destination increases, it is essential to study the expectation and experience of tourists visited the destination.

Research Questions

Following are the major research questions framed for the study.

- What are the major problems affecting the development of heritage tourism in Kerala, particularly at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur?
- What is the level of expectation, experience and satisfaction of tourists visiting Cheraman Juma Masjid as a heritage tourism destination?
- What are the key prospects for sustainable heritage tourism development at Cheraman Juma Masjid in terms of cultural preservation, economic benefits, and regional development?

Objectives of the Study

To identify and analyze the major problems affecting the growth and management of heritage tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid.

To analyze the level of expectation, experience and satisfaction of tourists visiting Cheraman Juma Masjid.

To examine the role of local communities and other stakeholders in the conservation and development of heritage tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid.

To know the effect of heritage value, tourism infrastructure, promotion awareness on visitor satisfaction and future prospects of tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study is confined to examining the problems and prospects of heritage tourism with special reference to Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur, one of the oldest mosques in India and a significant heritage site in Kerala. The study focuses on the historical, cultural, and religious importance of the mosque and its role in promoting heritage tourism in the region. It covers aspects such as tourism infrastructure, accessibility, visitor facilities, promotional efforts, stakeholder involvement, and the socio-economic impact of tourism on the local community. The study also analyses the major challenges faced in heritage tourism development, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of awareness, conservation issues, and the need to balance religious sanctity with tourism activities, while exploring future prospects for sustainable and community-based heritage tourism development in and around Cheraman Juma Masjid.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the problems and prospects of heritage tourism with special reference to Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur. Both **primary and secondary data** are used for the study. Primary data are collected through **structured questionnaires** administered to tourists, pilgrims, local residents, and tourism-related stakeholders, along with **personal interviews** with mosque authorities, local tourism officials, and shop owners to gain in-depth insights. Secondary data are sourced from **books, journals, research articles,**

government tourism reports, publications of the Kerala Tourism Department, UNESCO and Muziris Heritage Project documents, websites, and newspapers. The study area is limited to Cheraman Juma Masjid and its surrounding locality in Kodungallur, and a **convenience sampling method** is adopted due to accessibility constraints. The collected data are analyzed using **statistical tools such as percentages, tables, Multiple regression and Structural Equation modeling** along with qualitative interpretation to identify key problems and assess future prospects. The methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of heritage tourism development and provides a basis for drawing conclusions and policy-oriented suggestions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objectives: To know the level of satisfaction of tourists, problems faced by the tourists and the role of local community in the development of tourism.

The analysis of primary data collected from tourists, pilgrims, and local residents reveals statistically significant insights into the problems and prospects of heritage tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur. Percentage analysis shows that about **68% of respondents identified historical and religious significance** as the main reason for visiting the site, while only **22% cited tourism promotion or information availability**, indicating limited marketing effectiveness. A **Chi-square test** conducted to examine the relationship between *visitor satisfaction* and *availability of tourist facilities* revealed a significant association at the 5% level (χ^2 calculated $>$ χ^2 table value), suggesting that inadequate infrastructure such as parking, sanitation, and signage significantly affects visitor satisfaction. Further, a **mean score analysis** of tourist perception indicates high satisfaction with spiritual ambience (mean score above 4 on a 5-point Likert scale), but moderate to low satisfaction with amenities and guided interpretation services (mean score below 3). A **t-test** comparing perceptions of local residents and tourists regarding economic benefits showed a statistically significant difference, indicating that local residents perceive tourism benefits as limited compared to tourist expectations. Correlation analysis also reveals a positive relationship between *heritage awareness* and *revisit intention*, implying that improved tourism infrastructure, promotion and awareness can enhance repeat visitation. The discussion of these results highlights that while Cheraman Juma Masjid possesses strong heritage tourism potential, infrastructural deficiencies, weak promotional strategies, and limited stakeholder coordination hinder optimal development. The statistical findings support the need for targeted policy interventions, improved facility management, and sustainable tourism planning to enhance both visitor satisfaction and local community benefits.

Objectives: To know the effect of heritage value, tourism infrastructure, promotion awareness on visitor satisfaction and future prospects of tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur.

The results of the study were further examined using **multiple regression analysis and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)** to understand the factors influencing heritage tourism development and visitor satisfaction at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur. **Multiple regression analysis** was employed by considering **visitor satisfaction** as the dependent variable and factors such as **heritage value, tourism infrastructure, promotion and awareness** as independent variables. The regression results indicate that **Heritage value ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$)** and **tourism infrastructure ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.05$)** have a statistically significant positive impact on visitor satisfaction, promotional activities show a weaker but positive influence

Conceptual SEM Framework

The Structural Equation Model is developed to examine the relationships between heritage-related factors and tourism outcomes, with **Visitor Satisfaction** and future prospects of tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur.

Latent Variables and Indicators

A. Heritage Value (HV) (Exogenous Variable)

Historical significance

Cultural importance

Religious importance

Authenticity of the site

B. Tourism Infrastructure (TI) (Exogenous Variable)

- Accessibility
- Parking facilities
- Sanitation and cleanliness
- Signage and information facilities

C. Promotion & Awareness (PA) (Exogenous Variable)

- Government promotion
- Digital marketing
- Availability of tourist information
- Awareness among tourists

D. Visitor Satisfaction (VS) (Mediating Variable)

- Satisfaction with overall experience
- Satisfaction with facilities
- Satisfaction with interpretation and guidance
- Willingness to revisit

E. Future Tourism Prospects (FTP) (Endogenous Variable)

- Growth in tourist arrivals
- Economic benefits to local community
- Sustainability of heritage tourism
- Recommendation intention

2. Structural Relationships (Hypothesized Paths)

The SEM model tests the following relationships:

- H1:** Heritage Value → Visitor Satisfaction
- H2:** Tourism Infrastructure → Visitor Satisfaction
- H3:** Promotion & Awareness → Visitor Satisfaction
- H4:** Visitor Satisfaction → Future Tourism Prospects
- H5:** Heritage Value → Future Tourism Prospects
- H6:** Tourism Infrastructure → Future Tourism Prospects

Visitor Satisfaction acts as a **mediator** between:

- Heritage Value and Future Tourism Prospects
- Tourism Infrastructure and Future Tourism Prospects
- Promotion & Awareness and Future Tourism Prospects.

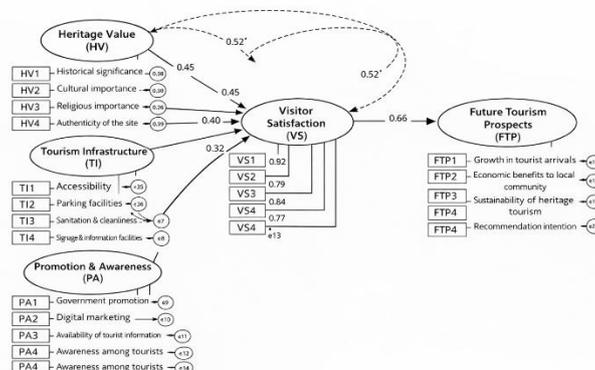


Fig.1. SEM Model for Heritage tourism prospects for Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur.

The overall model was found to be significant (F-statistic significant at 5% level) with a satisfactory explanatory power, indicating that the selected variables effectively explain variations in visitor satisfaction.

To gain deeper insights into the interrelationships among observed and latent variables, **Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)** was applied. The SEM framework included latent constructs such as **Heritage Value, Tourism Infrastructure, Promotion & Awareness, Visitor Satisfaction, and Future Tourism Prospects**. The model fit indices indicate a good fit ($\chi^2/df < 3$, CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08), confirming the reliability of the proposed model. The structural paths reveal that **Heritage Value has a strong direct effect on Visitor Satisfaction**, while **Tourism Infrastructure acts as a partial mediator** between Heritage Value and Future Tourism Prospects. Promotion and awareness were found to have a significant indirect effect on future tourism prospects through visitor satisfaction. These findings suggest that enhancing heritage value not only improves satisfaction but also strengthens the long-term sustainability and growth of heritage tourism at the site.

The discussion of the results highlights that although Cheraman Juma Masjid possesses exceptional heritage value, the full tourism potential can be realized only through strategic improvements in infrastructure, interpretation facilities, and coordinated promotional efforts. The regression and SEM results collectively confirm that **visitor satisfaction plays a central mediating role** in translating heritage resources into sustainable tourism prospects. Therefore, policy interventions focusing on integrated heritage management, community participation, and experience-oriented tourism development are essential for addressing existing problems and maximizing the prospects of heritage tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur. The SEM results indicate that **heritage value and tourism infrastructure significantly influence visitor satisfaction**, which in turn strongly determines **future tourism prospects**. Promotion and awareness exert both direct and indirect effects through visitor satisfaction. This confirms that while Cheraman Juma Masjid possesses strong intrinsic heritage value, **visitor satisfaction is the key mechanism** through which heritage resources are transformed into sustainable tourism outcomes

V. CONCLUSION

The study of heritage tourism at **Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungallur** demonstrates that while the site possesses exceptional historical, cultural, and religious significance, several challenges limit its tourism potential. Analysis of primary data reveals that visitor satisfaction is strongly influenced by heritage value, infrastructure facilities, and awareness programs, whereas promotional activities and accessibility play a smaller role. Regression results highlight that infrastructure and heritage interpretation significantly enhance visitor satisfaction, while SEM findings confirm that visitor satisfaction mediates the relationship between heritage value, tourism infrastructure, promotion, and future tourism prospects. The findings further indicate that inadequate parking, sanitation, signage, and limited guided interpretation reduce satisfaction, and local residents perceive economic benefits as lower than tourists' expectations. Overall, the study underscores that **heritage value, tourism infrastructure, promotion and awareness** are essential to maximize visitor satisfaction and ensure the sustainable growth and long-term prospects of heritage tourism at Cheraman Juma Masjid.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Anas, M., Rahman, M. A., & Hussain, S. (2025). Sustainable tourism in Kerala: Development models, challenges, and strategic imperatives. *NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(1), 45–60. <https://nepjol.info/index.php/nprcjm/article/view/85862>
- [2]. Devi, R. R. (2019). A study on cultural and heritage tourism in Kerala, India. *Thematics Journal of Geography*, 8(2), 1–10. <https://journals.eduindex.org/index.php/tjg/article/view/14436>
- [3]. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research. (2025). Heritage tourism and sustainability: A review with reference to Kerala. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(5), 1–12. <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2025/5/54650.pdf>
- [4]. Kerala Tourism. (n.d.). *Muziris Heritage Project: Features and objectives*. Government of Kerala. <https://www.keralatourism.org/muziris/muziris-project>

- [5]. Nithya, U. S. (2017). Problems and prospects of heritage tourism in Kerala. *International Research Journal of Management and Commerce*, 4(1), 67–74. <https://www.aarf.asia/current/2018/Jan/PD2p9GXwMsrtmpm.pdf>
- [6]. Pandalam Palace Project Report. (2016). *Problems and prospects of heritage tourism at Pandalam Palace*. NSS College, Pandalam. <https://www.scribd.com/document/502784604/Project-heritage>
- [7]. Responsible tourism in Kerala with special reference to Vaikom. (n.d.). *International Journal of Research in Commerce, Management and Social Sciences*. <https://ijrcms.com/responsible-tourism-in-kerala-with-special-reference-to-responsible-tourism-in-vaikom/>
- [8]. Suresh Kumar, K., & Thanikkad, J. (2024). Cultural tourism product satisfaction in Kerala. *Atna Journal of Tourism Studies*, 19(1), 23-38. <https://journals.christuniversity.in/index.php/atna/article/view/3910>
- [9]. Cultural and heritage tourism: Trend and potential of Kerala, India. (n.d.). *ResearchGate*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332274883>