

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN MYSURU DISTRICT (1990–2020): A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Rathnamma M

Assistant Professor

Department of Geography, Maharani Arts College for Women, Mysuru.

Thejomani B D

Professor (Retd.)

Department of Geography, Maharaja's College, Mysuru.

ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to employment generation, regional development, cultural preservation, and economic diversification. Mysuru district, often referred to as the cultural capital of Karnataka, possesses a rich combination of heritage, religious, ecological, and recreational attractions that make it one of South India's leading tourism destinations. This study examines the growth and development of tourism in Mysuru district from 1990 to 2020, focusing on tourism classification, tourist growth patterns, accessibility, accommodation, and supporting amenities. Using secondary data and a geographical approach, the study reveals that domestic tourism has consistently dominated the tourism sector, while international tourism has shown gradual growth in heritage, eco-tourism, and spiritual tourism segments. The findings indicate that improved transportation infrastructure, diversified tourism resources, enhanced accommodation facilities, and better urban amenities contributed significantly to tourism growth between 1990 and 2010. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in tourist arrivals during 2020. The study concludes that sustainable tourism planning, digital integration, and resilient tourism management are essential for the future growth of tourism in Mysuru.

Keywords: Tourism Development, Mysuru District, Heritage Tourism, Eco-tourism, Tourist Growth, Accessibility, Accommodation, Tourism Infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to economic development, employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure improvement, and cultural exchange. The growth of tourism has been facilitated by advancements in transportation and communication technologies, rising disposable incomes, globalization, and increased leisure opportunities. Beyond its economic contributions, tourism plays an important role in promoting cultural understanding, heritage conservation, and regional development, making it a key component of sustainable development strategies worldwide (UNWTO, 2020; Cooper et al., 2008).

India is recognized as one of the world's major tourism destinations due to its rich cultural heritage, historical monuments, diverse landscapes, religious traditions, and ecological resources. The tourism sector has become an important contributor to the national economy by generating employment opportunities and stimulating regional growth (Government of India, 2020). Within India, Karnataka occupies a prominent place in the tourism sector owing to its historical sites, wildlife reserves, hill stations, beaches, and vibrant cultural traditions. The state's diverse attractions draw millions of domestic and international tourists annually (Karnataka Tourism Policy, 2020).

Among the tourist destinations of Karnataka, Mysuru district holds a unique position because of its rich historical, cultural, architectural, and ecological heritage. Often referred to as the "Cultural Capital of Karnataka," Mysuru has developed into one of the most important tourism centers in South India (Nayak & Keerthi, 2018). The district's tourism significance is closely associated with the legacy of the Wadiyar dynasty, which contributed extensively to the development of palaces, temples, museums, gardens, and cultural institutions. These heritage assets continue to attract a large number of visitors and form the foundation of Mysuru's tourism economy (Kamath, 2001).

The district is home to several renowned tourist attractions, including Mysore Palace, Chamundi Hills, St. Philomena's Church, Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery, Lalitha Mahal Palace, Brindavan Gardens, and the historic monuments of Srirangapatna. These attractions cater to various forms of tourism such as heritage, cultural, religious, recreational, and educational tourism (Department of Tourism, Government of Karnataka, 2020). Furthermore, the internationally acclaimed Mysuru Dasara festival significantly enhances the district's tourism appeal. Celebrated with grandeur and cultural richness, the festival attracts visitors from across India and abroad, contributing substantially to the local economy and strengthening Mysuru's global tourism image (Reddy, 2013).

Tourism development in Mysuru has also been supported by improvements in transportation, accommodation facilities, and tourism-related infrastructure. The district's connectivity through road, rail, and air networks has facilitated tourist mobility and enhanced accessibility to major attractions. The expansion of hospitality services and supporting amenities has further strengthened its position as a leading tourism destination (Bhatia, 2011).

The period from 1990 to 2020 witnessed significant growth and transformation in Mysuru's tourism sector. Economic liberalization, technological advancements, tourism policies, and increasing awareness of heritage and cultural tourism contributed to rising tourist arrivals and diversification of tourism activities (Ministry of Tourism, 2019). In this context, the present study examines the growth and development of tourism in Mysuru district during 1990–2020, focusing on tourism classification, tourist flow patterns, accessibility, accommodation facilities, and tourism-supporting amenities. The study aims to understand the changing dimensions of tourism and assess the factors influencing tourism development in the district.

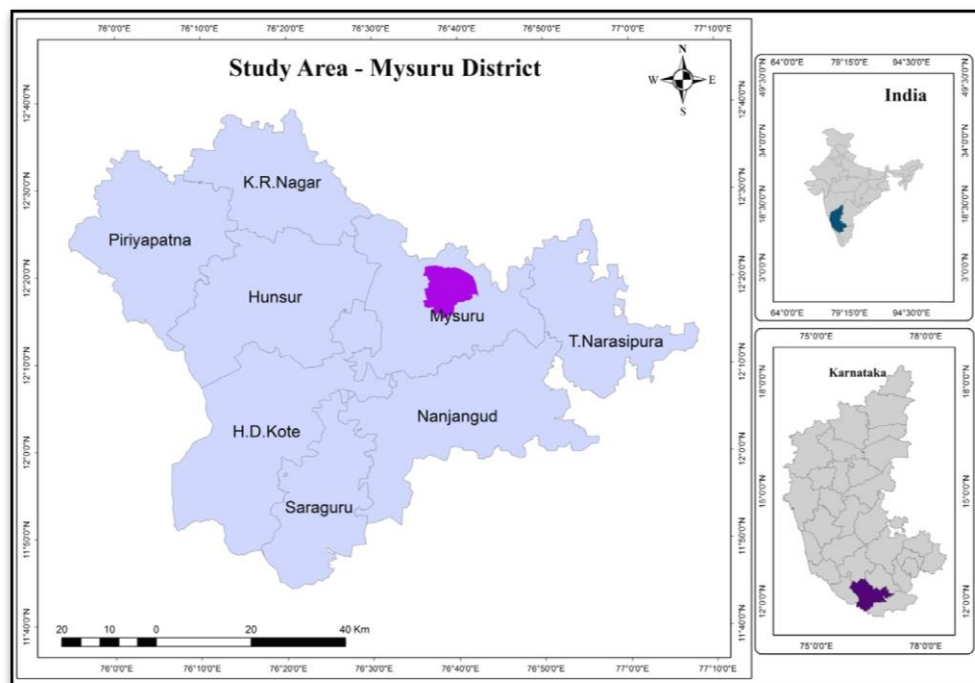
The main objective of the study is to examine and analyze the growth and development of tourism in Mysuru district between 1990 and 2020 by assessing trends in tourist arrivals, accessibility, accommodation facilities, tourism amenities and overall tourism infrastructure.

STUDY AREA:

Mysuru district, situated in the southern part of Karnataka, is one of the most prominent cultural, historical, and tourism regions in India. Often referred to as the "Cultural Capital of Karnataka," the district is distinguished by its rich royal heritage, architectural landmarks, religious institutions, wildlife resources, and vibrant cultural traditions. Historically, Mysuru served as the capital of the erstwhile Mysore Kingdom under the patronage of the Wadiyar dynasty, whose contributions significantly shaped the region's cultural and architectural landscape.

Geographically, Mysuru district extends between 11°44' N and 12°39' N latitudes and 75°54' E and 77°08' E longitudes, covering an area of approximately 6,320 km², which constitutes about 3.29 percent of the total geographical area of Karnataka. The district is bounded by Mandya and Hassan districts to the north, Chamarajanagar district to the east and south, Kodagu district to the west, and the state of Kerala to the southwest. Owing to its strategic

location and close proximity to Bengaluru, the state capital, Mysuru has emerged as an important center for tourism, commerce, culture, and regional development. The district's diverse tourism resources, coupled with its historical significance and accessibility, make it an ideal study area for examining tourism growth and development.



METHODOLOGY:

The study is based primarily on secondary data and adopts a geographical approach to examine the growth and development of tourism in Mysuru district from 1990 to 2020. Data were collected from the Department of Tourism, Government of Karnataka, Ministry of Tourism, District Statistical Handbooks, KSTDC publications, Census reports, research articles, books, journals, and official records of major tourist destinations. Both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized, including tourist arrivals, accommodation facilities, transport infrastructure, and tourism amenities. Descriptive and comparative statistical techniques were employed to analyze tourism trends, while spatial analysis was used to classify and interpret tourism resources and their distribution patterns.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS:

Tourism Classification of Mysuru District

Mysuru is widely regarded as the cultural capital of Karnataka, with the Mysore Dasara serving as its flagship event. Historically, the city functioned as a major administrative centre during the pre-independence period under the rule of the Wadiyar Dynasty, whose patronage significantly shaped the region's art, architecture, education, culture, and traditions. Today, Mysuru is recognized as a prominent urban centre known for its heritage, religious, recreational, and cultural attractions, drawing both international and domestic tourists.

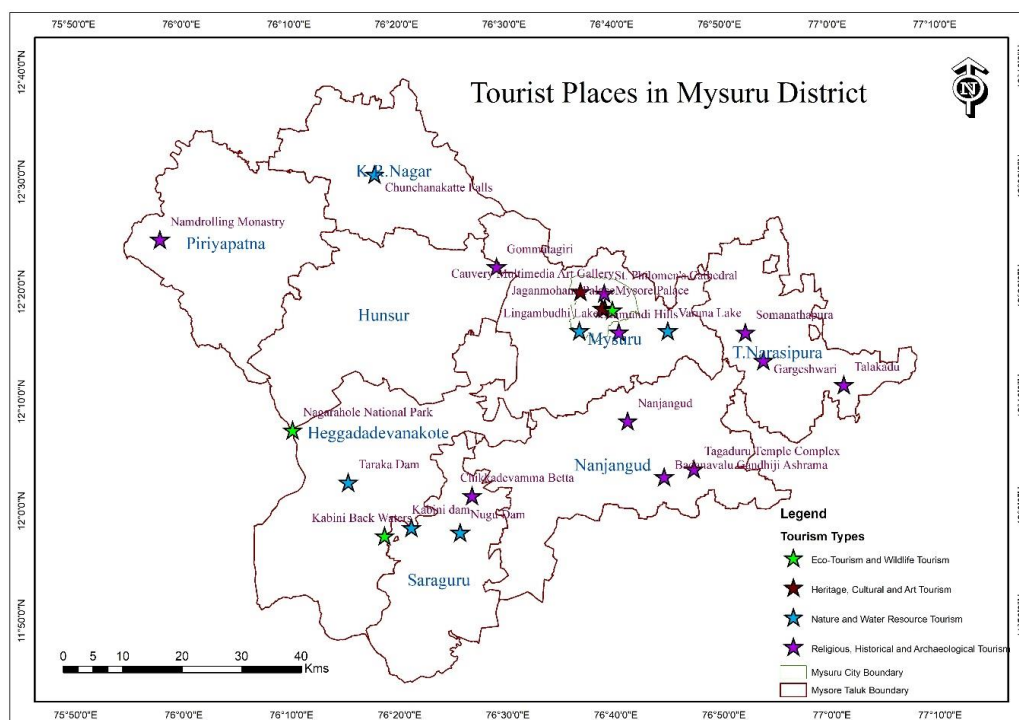
Tourism in Mysuru district represents a diverse and multidimensional sector influenced by its historical legacy, cultural richness, ecological resources, and spiritual significance. The sustained contributions of the Wadiyar rulers have played a crucial role in establishing Mysuru as a major tourism destination in India. For analytical clarity, tourism in the district can be classified into categories such as heritage tourism, religious tourism, eco-tourism,

cultural tourism, rural tourism, and water-based tourism. This classification facilitates a better understanding of spatial distribution, resource utilization, and sustainable tourism planning. Among these, heritage and palace tourism constitute the core identity of Mysuru, reflecting its royal grandeur and architectural excellence.

Table 1: Classification of Tourism in Mysuru District

Category	Major Attractions	Tourism Characteristics
Heritage, Cultural and Art Tourism	Mysore Palace, Jaganmohan Palace, Cauvery Multimedia Art Gallery	Royal heritage, architecture, art and culture
Religious, Historical and Archaeological Tourism	Chamundi Hill, Nanjangud, Talakadu, Somanathapura, Bylakuppe, Gommatagiri	Pilgrimage, archaeology, religious heritage
Eco-Tourism and Wildlife Tourism	Nagarahole National Park, Kabini Backwaters, Mysuru Zoo	Biodiversity, wildlife conservation, nature-based tourism
Nature and Water Resource Tourism	Varuna Lake, Lingambudhi Lake, Chunchanakatte Falls, Kabini Dam, Taraka Dam, Nugu Dam	

Source: Compiled by the Author based on Karnataka Tourism Department reports, KSTDC publications, ASI records, and secondary sources (2025).



Map 1: Tourist Place in Mysore District

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE STUDY AREA (1990–2020)

Tourism has evolved significantly from a privilege enjoyed by a small elite to a major global economic activity. The growth of modern tourism is closely linked to industrialization,

urbanization, rising incomes, improved transportation, increased leisure time, and changing social attitudes toward travel and recreation. According to Mason (1990), key factors contributing to tourism growth include higher standards of living, advancements in transport technology, paid holidays, changing perceptions of destinations, and an increasing desire to travel. Following the Second World War, expanding road, rail, and air networks further accelerated tourism development worldwide.

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, tourism became increasingly influenced by changing consumer preferences, lifestyle trends, and destination image (Prosser, 1994). Growing environmental awareness also encouraged the emergence of sustainable forms of tourism such as eco-tourism and community-based tourism (Fennell, 1999). In India, these global trends contributed to the expansion and diversification of tourism activities. Between 1990 and 2020, Mysuru district experienced substantial tourism growth driven by its rich cultural heritage, religious centres, wildlife resources, improved infrastructure, and enhanced accessibility, establishing it as one of Karnataka's leading tourism destinations.

The major factors responsible for tourism growth are discussed under the following headings:

- i. Growth of Tourist Inflow
- ii. Growth of Accessibility
- iii. Growth of Accommodation Facilities
- iv. Growth of Amenities and Tourism Infrastructure

GROWTH OF TOURIST INFLOW

Tourism in Mysuru district recorded significant growth between 1990 and 2010, followed by a sharp decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Major attractions such as Mysore Palace, Chamundi Hill, and Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Garden consistently attracted the highest number of visitors, reflecting the district's strong cultural, heritage, and recreational appeal.

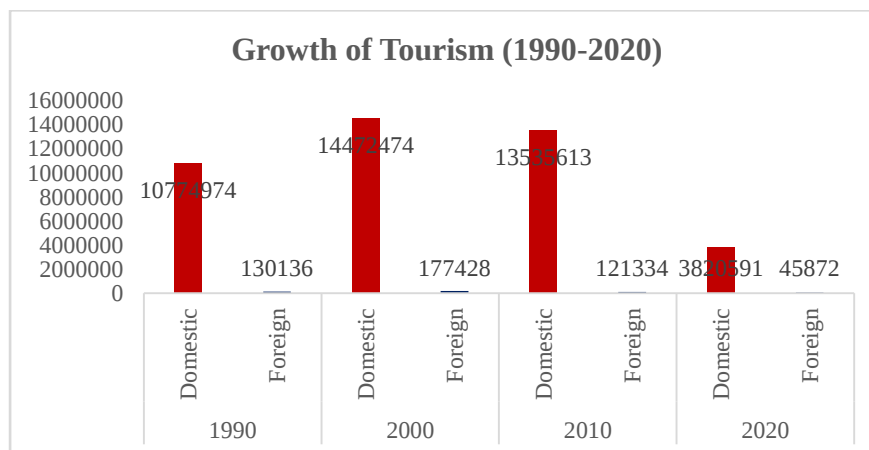
Table 2: Flow of tourist from 1990-2020

Year	1990		2000		2010		2020	
Tourist Places	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Mysore Palace	2578560	92000	3300381	125386	3790918	59200	903381	19949
Art Gallery	124300	4780	216435	6825	219739	5500	5406	62
Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Garden (Mysore Zoo)	2281764	18350	3071508	22350	3149193	27642	805202	10014
Chamundi Hill	2673280	2530	3423180	1850	3474196	3490	1066340	1030
Nanjanagudu	2345700	1070	2877504	394	1025000	540	291673	183

St. Philomena's Cathedral	490110	1938	574680	2018	752300	5300	332450	2250
Somanathapura	115300	7200	154345	9245	193408	10432	87012	2576
Talakadu	50320	110	623400	520	555000	1050	129096	750
Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (National Park)	35790	1180	108461	7370	117169	6400	123377	8718
Bylakuppe Golden Temple	79850	978	122580	1470	258690	1780	76654	340

Source: KSTDC

During 1990–2000, tourism expanded considerably. Domestic visitors to Mysore Palace increased from 2.58 million to 3.30 million (28% growth), while foreign tourists rose from 92,000 to 125,386. Similarly, Mysore Zoo recorded an increase from 2.28 million to 3.07 million domestic visitors and from 18,350 to 22,350 foreign visitors. Chamundi Hill attracted 3.42 million domestic tourists by 2000 compared to 2.67 million in 1990. Eco-tourism destinations such as Nagarahole Tiger Reserve also gained popularity, with foreign visitors increasing from 1,180 to 7,370 (Table 2).



The decade 2000–2010 represented the peak growth phase. Mysore Palace received 3.79 million domestic tourists in 2010, while Chamundi Hill attracted 3.47 million visitors. Mysore Zoo recorded 3.15 million domestic and 27,642 foreign tourists. Heritage sites such as Somanathapura increased from 154,345 to 193,408 domestic visitors and from 9,245 to 10,432 foreign visitors, indicating growing interest in heritage tourism.

However, tourism declined drastically in 2020. Domestic visitors to Mysore Palace fell from 3.79 million to 903,381, while foreign arrivals declined from 59,200 to 19,949. Mysore Zoo recorded a reduction from 3.15 million to 805,202 domestic visitors. Chamundi Hill also declined from 3.47 million to 1.07 million visitors. These declines resulted from lockdowns,

travel restrictions, and health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, domestic tourism remained the backbone of Mysuru's tourism economy throughout the study period.

GROWTH OF ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility played a crucial role in the growth of tourism in Mysuru during 1990–2000. Improvements in road and rail connectivity significantly enhanced tourist mobility and increased visitor inflow to major attractions. The Bengaluru–Mysuru road corridor was gradually upgraded, reducing travel difficulties and encouraging weekend and short-duration tourism. Better road networks also improved access to heritage destinations such as Somanathapura and Talakadu, integrating them into the district's tourism circuit.

Rail transport further strengthened tourism growth. Mysuru Junction emerged as an important transport hub, connecting the city with Bengaluru, Chennai, and other major urban centers. Improved train services made travel affordable and convenient, contributing to increased domestic tourist arrivals. Public transport services provided by the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) and city buses ensured efficient connectivity to attractions such as Mysore Palace, Chamundi Hill, and Mysore Zoo.

Although air connectivity remained limited, enhanced road and rail infrastructure contributed to substantial tourism growth, with Mysore Palace recording about 28% growth and Mysore Zoo nearly 35% growth in visitor arrivals during the decade.

GROWTH OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES

The growth of accommodation and amenities played a crucial role in strengthening tourism in Mysuru, particularly during the period 2000–2010. To meet increasing tourist demand, authorities improved essential facilities such as sanitation, safe drinking water, parking areas, multilingual signboards, and tourist information centres, enhancing visitor convenience and satisfaction.

Urban infrastructure improvements, including better roads, drainage systems, street lighting, cleanliness, and waste management, further enhanced Mysuru's image as a safe and tourist-friendly destination. The introduction of digital facilities such as online ticketing at major attractions and GPS-enabled transport services improved accessibility and visitor management.

Accommodation facilities expanded significantly during the study period. The number of lodges increased from about 440 in 2000 to 691 in 2020, while hotels grew from 702 to approximately 1,350. The sector diversified to include budget hotels, premium hotels, heritage stays, homestays, and eco-resorts near Nagarahole. These developments supported rising tourist inflow and helped establish Mysuru as a diversified and sustainable tourism destination.

GROWTH OF AMENITIES

The development of amenities significantly contributed to the growth of tourism in Mysuru, particularly during 2000–2010. To accommodate increasing tourist inflow, the city improved essential facilities such as sanitation, safe drinking water, parking areas, multilingual signboards, tourist information centres, banks, and ATMs. These amenities enhanced visitor convenience and accessibility.

Mysuru also strengthened its urban infrastructure through better roads, drainage systems, street lighting, cleanliness, and waste management, helping the city gain recognition as one of India's cleanest urban centres. Safety measures, including increased police presence,

surveillance systems, and improved traffic management, further enhanced the tourist experience.

The introduction of digital tourism initiatives, such as online ticketing at Mysore Palace and Mysore Zoo, along with GPS-enabled transport services, improved mobility and visitor management. Cultural events, particularly the Mysuru Dasara festival, further boosted tourist inflow and promoted the city's heritage. Overall, these developments enhanced tourist satisfaction, diversified tourism activities, and established Mysuru as a well-equipped, sustainable, and attractive tourism destination.

CONCLUSION

Tourism has emerged as a vital driver of economic growth, cultural preservation, and regional development across the world. In Karnataka, Mysuru district occupies a significant position due to its rich historical legacy, architectural heritage, cultural traditions, religious attractions, and natural resources. The district's tourism development has been strongly influenced by the heritage of the Wadiyar dynasty, the iconic Mysore Palace, the internationally renowned Mysuru Dasara festival, and numerous other tourist attractions. Between 1990 and 2020, improvements in transportation, accommodation facilities, and tourism infrastructure, coupled with supportive government policies and growing tourist awareness, contributed substantially to the expansion of tourism activities in the district. The increasing diversification of tourism into heritage, cultural, religious, educational, and eco-tourism has further strengthened Mysuru's appeal. Therefore, understanding the growth patterns and development trends of tourism in Mysuru is essential for effective planning, sustainable tourism management, and enhancing the district's future tourism potential.

REFERENCES:

1. Bhatia, A. K. (2011). *Tourism development: Principles and practices*. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
2. Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2008). *Tourism: Principles and practice* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
3. Department of Tourism, Government of Karnataka. (2020). *Karnataka tourism policy 2020–2025*. Government of Karnataka.
4. Fennell, D. A. (1999). *Ecotourism: An introduction*. Routledge.
5. Government of India, Ministry of Tourism. (2020). *India tourism statistics 2020*. Ministry of Tourism.
6. Kamath, S. U. (2001). *A concise history of Karnataka*. Jupiter Books.
7. Mason, P. (1990). *Tourism, environment and development*. Routledge.
8. Ministry of Tourism. (2019). *Annual report 2018–19*. Government of India.
9. Nayak, V., & Keerthi, B. (2018). Tourism development and heritage conservation in Mysuru City. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(4), 221–230.
10. Prosser, R. (1994). Societal change and the growth of alternative tourism. In E. Cater & G. Lowman (Eds.), *Ecotourism: A sustainable option?* (pp. 19–37). John Wiley & Sons.
11. Reddy, G. P. (2013). Cultural festivals and tourism development: A study of Mysore Dasara. *Indian Journal of Tourism and Heritage Studies*, 6(2), 45–58.
12. United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2020). *International tourism highlights 2020 edition*. UNWTO.

