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Eco-Tourism Plan

...Causes Ecological Concerns

New resorts being set up as part of the Kerala government's efforts at promoting eco-tourism and the resultant inflow of tourists as well as encroachment by intruders are all leading to the ecological destruction of Vagamon region located on the fringes of Idukki district, alleges a recent study conducted by Jananeethi, a Thrissur-based non-government organization (NGO).

Emphasising that the study focused on Vagamon tourism and its aftermath and that it was conducted at the behest of the local residents, Jananeethi executive director George Pulikuthiyil said the damage being done to the eco-systems and the terrain by the upcoming resorts and the flow of tourists was huge and shocking.

Here it may be mentioned that Vagamon, situated 100 km from Kochi and 64 km from Kottayam, at an altitude of 1,100 metres above sea level, is surrounded by the lush greenery of tea gardens, beautiful meadows, deep puzzling valleys and dales.

It is a trekker's paradise and is currently being promoted as one of Kerala's foremost eco-tourism spots.

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At the Global Investors' Meet (GIM) held in Kochi on January 18 and 19 this year, several leading business groups, including those from abroad, have expressed interest in Vagamon, where 1,800 acres of land is being developed as a 'holistic health destination'.

Quoting extensively from the findings of the said study, Pulikuthiyil said, "These upcoming resorts are blocking the naturally formed streams. And the tourist vehicles that ply on the silken hills have disturbed the natural quiet, shaken the soil, loosened the rocky structures and disturbed the entire ecology of the area. All these have caused uneasiness in the minds of the local inhabitants."

Besides, several tourism operators have encroached with or without permission the rich grasslands, natural lakes and lovely cliffs as well as some of the tea plantations for their business promotion.

They have also begun indiscriminate constructions on the natural grasslands claiming that it was wasteland. For the time being, the High Court of Kerala has stayed all construction works in the region by an order of injunction, Pulikuthiyil added.


Pointing out that two lakes originally belonging to the government-owned lands have been encroached by private lobbies and some of the resorts have started releasing their sewage water into the stream that later forms the Meenachil river, he said, "the state government had not made a single honest attempt to evacuate the intruders nor to check the river pollution."

Alleging that the damage already done on the region by the tourists is very alarming, he said, "barrels of plastic bottles and polythene bags brought in by tourists who come in large numbers are crushed and split all over the region. The vehicles bringing these tourists ply all over and scale the meadows and disturb the soil, thereby causing soil erosion from the top of the hills, which in turn block the water-logged joints of the hills and valleys. These in effect are likely to dry out the streams that feed the Meenachil, Manimalayar and Periyar rivers leading to deprivation of drinking water to thousands of people in the lower plains."

The presence of huge number of tourists and dozens of upcoming resorts would further aggravate the water crisis.

Fuente de la información: business-standard.com

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