

- Ecotourism, known as **ecological tourism**, is the responsible factor to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and often small scale.
- Eco tourism is a form of tourism that was officially defined in the **1980s**. Since then it is evolving and the current ideal eco tourism practices promote sustainable development; (World Tourism Organization, 2005).
- With destinations facing increasing rates of poverty and degrading environments, the need for a win-win is necessary. As such, eco- tourism is a potential solution that could help **contribute to poverty alleviation and conservation efforts** and help encourage more sustainable development.

CASE STUDIES

S.N O	ASPECT	CHOTI HALDWANI	YERCAUD
1	Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choti Haldwani is one of the villages in Jim Corbett national park. • Poor living condition of local community and demand of community to conserve biodiversity needs to be addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yercaud is a popular tourist destination in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. • Unsustainable human practices have negatively impacted the environment resulting in micro- climatic changes; significant loss of flora and fauna; environmental degradation and poor living conditions of the local community
2	Aim	To investigate whether eco tourism uplift the livelihood of local community meeting their demands.	To provide practical measures for community development and conservation of biodiversity in Yercaud.
3	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify vulnerable communities and assess their living conditions. • Identify environmental issues in the area. • Evaluate existing tourist attractions. • Investigate methods for community to be involved in eco tourism activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify vulnerable communities and assess their living conditions. • Identify environmental issues in the area. • Evaluate existing tourist attractions. • Identify undeveloped local resources for eco tourism development • Determine potential demand for eco tourism
4	Methods and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Uttarakhand Forest Department in 2001, initiated a project to develop ecotourism in 4 villages with support from LEAD grant, IUCN Himal and resources from local NGOs, operators and communities. • The first step in the process was an Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action method with the community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author has followed Likert method of perception analysis to analyse the opinions and interests of tourists, the local residents on eco tourism dividing their opinions sector- wise;- Environmental protection; Community upliftment; and tourist inflow. • The final analysis is done by SWOT Analysis method and recommendations are given based on the SWOT table.
5	Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This ecotourism initiative has resulted in new jobs and additional supplementary sources of livelihood and 30 people are directly engaged in the initiative. • In terms of conservation, the community is involved in tree planting, informing the Forest Department about forest fires and wounded animals. • Women's participation has been through SHGs, which provide a number of souvenirs, which are sold at the shop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall maintenance of the eco-tourism project in Yercaud is done by the community. • The community is given viable economic dependencies such as parking management, tourist guides, souvenir shops, etc. • Conservation activities and tree planting are carried out by the native community itself as part of eco- tourism.

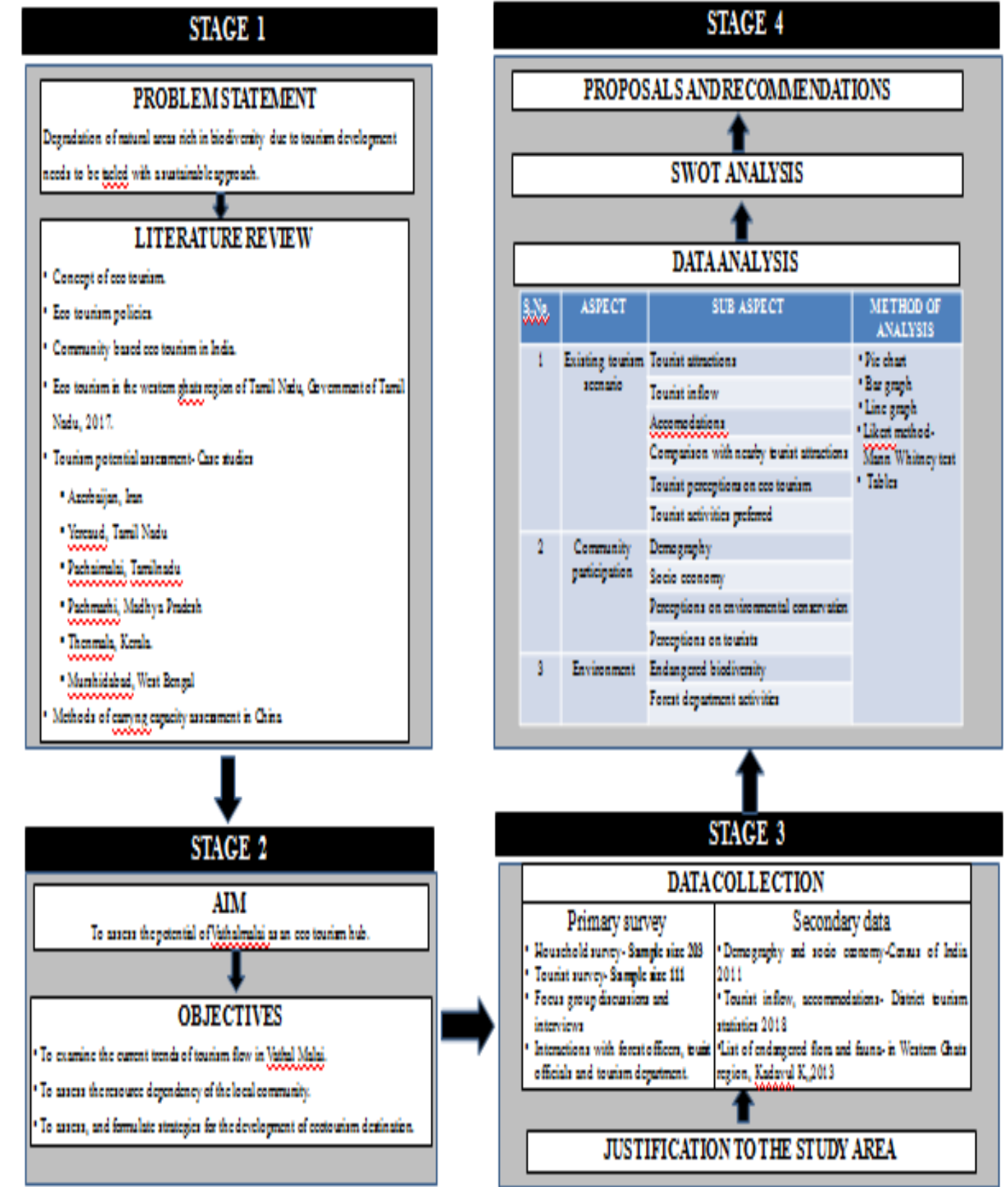
AIM:

To assess the potential of Vathalmalai as an eco tourism hub.

OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the current trends of tourism flow in Vathal Malai.
- To assess the resource dependency of the local community.
- To assess, and formulate strategies for the development of ecotourism destination.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



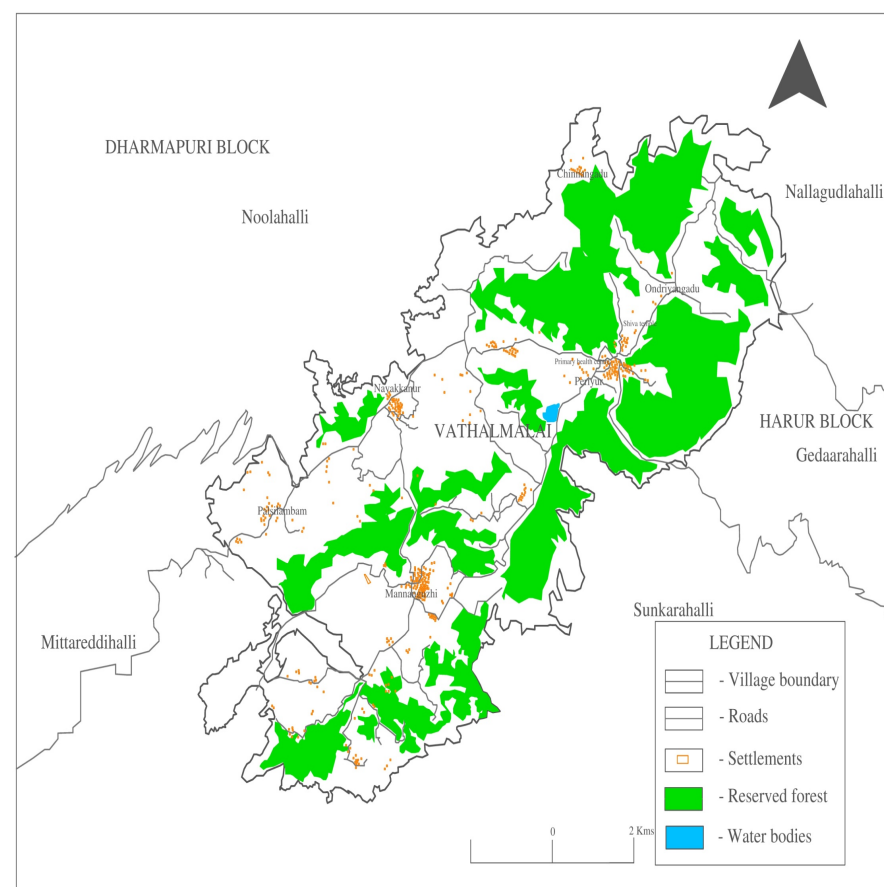
INTRODUCTION TO STUDY AREA:

- Vathalmalai or Vytla Hills is a hill station in Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu.
- It is located in the Dharmapuri block where the district headquarters is also present.
- It is located 25 km from Dharmapuri city and the road has 26 hairpin bends to reach hill top.
- It is located 13 KM towards South from District head quarters Dharmapuri. 20 KM from Morappur. 289 KM from State capital Chennai.
- The villages in Vathalmalai holds about 700 families with a population of 2111.
- Vathalmali has a subtropical and humid climate..

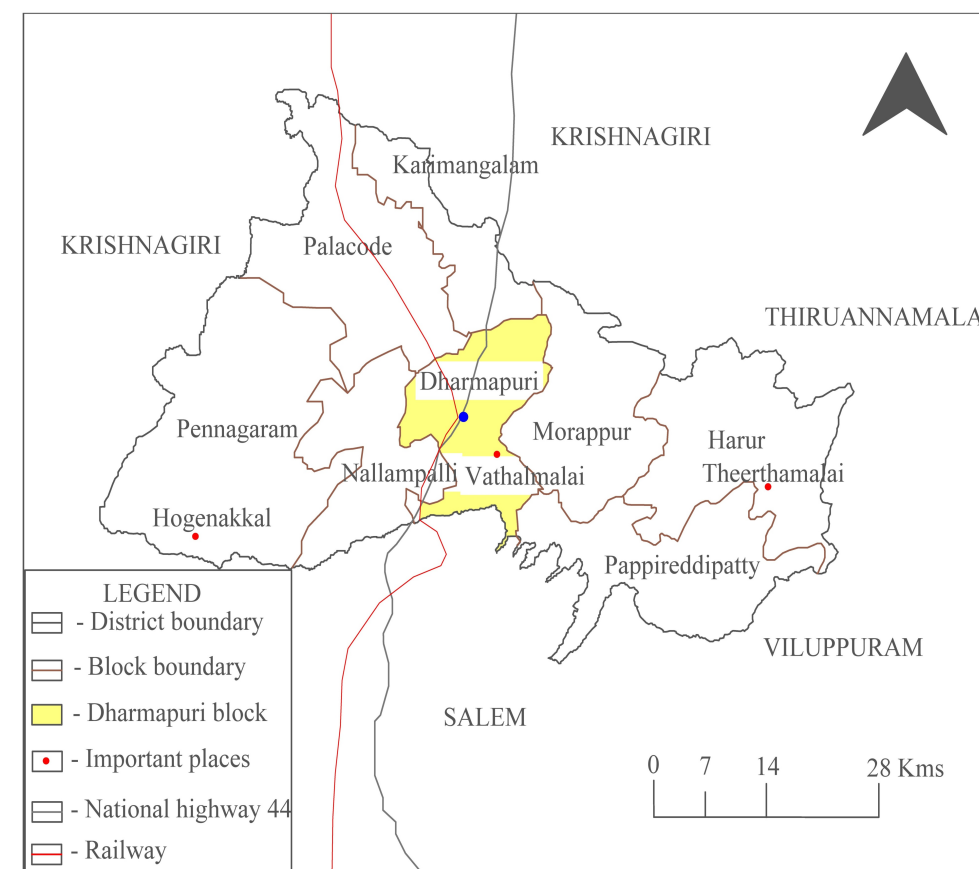
DEMOGRAPHY OF THE COMMUNITY

ASPECT	NUMBER
Total population	2111
Total male population	1125
Total female population	986
Number of households	672
Population density	9.38
Literacy rate	56 %

LOCATION OF VATHALMALAI



LOCATION AND LINKAGES OF VATHALMALAI IN DHARMAPURI DISTRICT



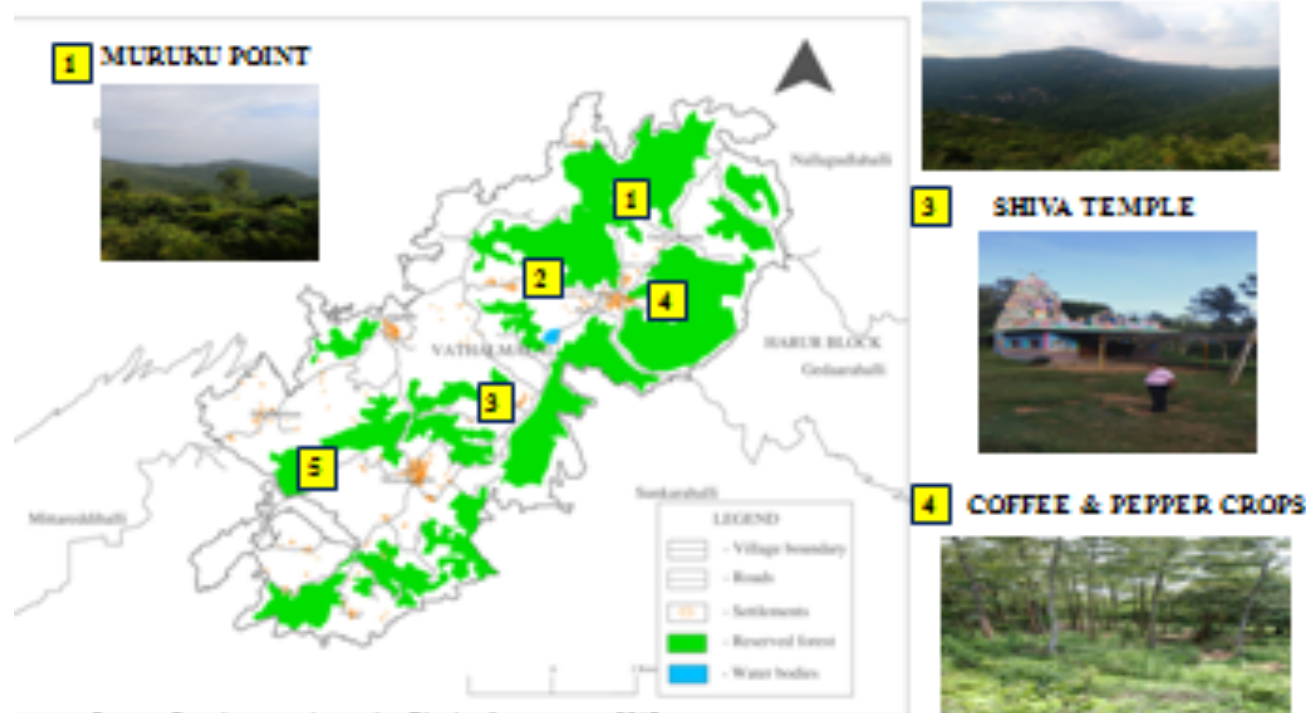
TOURISM:

- There are only 3 restaurants at present in Vathalmalai.
- These restaurants do not have washroom facilities.
- There are no public toilets in Vathalmalai.
- This is a huge issue represented by the tourists during peak season.
- Due to the lack of public toilets, there is prevalence of open urination and defecation
- Tourists demanded public transport and better road connectivity to Vathalmalai.
- Basic infrastructure such as public toilets, restaurants and hospitals have to be provided in Vathalmalai.

COMMUNITY:

- The local community depends on the forests for the firewood collection which is used for various domestic uses.
- The community has very few literates with stable jobs, so they demand a stable income to support their monthly expenses.
- The community demands incentives and subsidies from the government to improve their socio economic condition.

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN VATHALMALAI



Source: Based on google earth, District forest cover 2017

INITIATIVES BY THE FOREST DEPARTMENT

- The government has proposed a Botanical garden in Vathalmalai with special emphasis on medicinal plants in Vathalmalai.
- A children's park cum Recreational area is also proposed by the government.
- Two private holiday resorts are under construction in Vathalmalai.
- The local community sells their crop produce to the forest department for better prices.
- The community has regular interactions with the forest department. Although, the community expects subsidies from the forest department for their crop produce, in the form of seeds, saplings and selling at better prices.

INFERENCES:

- Based on the analysis, the community and tourists are highly in favour of Eco tourism.
- The community has apprehensions about the environmental degradation due to increased tourism population.
- Both the tourists and the community wanted basic public transport and accommodation facilities in the place.

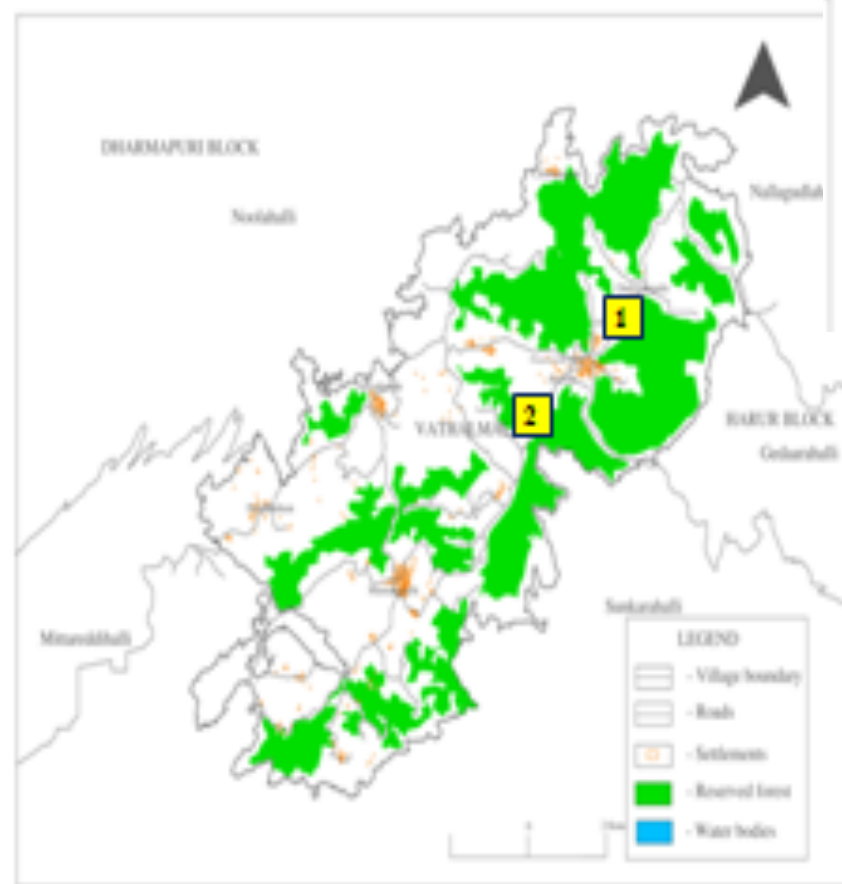
SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperate climate in comparison to surrounding lower altitude tourist destinations and plains • Does not take as long to reach destination from foot hills • Centrally located in South India • Close to large cities, such as Salem, Chennai and Bangalore • Many viewpoints and excellent landscapes • Have some unique local products such as, coffee and herbs. • Within destination, attractions are close to each other • Many little quiet villages with their own charm where people can seek solitude from crowds • Friendly community • Cleaner air and less crowded and polluted than populated cities • Unique threatened and protected animals such as Gaur, which can act as a draw • Presence of natural Lake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of public transport • Narrow roads • Lack of basic infrastructure such as accommodations, restaurants • Poor signage or information regarding the area, sites and facilities • Poor environmental record including failure to maintain environmental policies and behaviours • Unskilled/untrained local community • Loss of unique cultural traditions • Environmental degradation, especially of Lake and forest • Lack of adequate maintenance
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing tourist market: • Tourists who come as families are expected to increase. • Emerging business and student group market that could visit during the weekdays • Growing awareness about the environment and ecotourism • Strong demand from tourists (off-peak, but equally likely for peak season tourists) for a natural experience • Competing hill station destinations nearby: (Hogenakal, Theerthahalli, Yercaud and Yelagin) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warmer climate: tourists starting to find it hot • Poor environment: Degraded forest and few wild animal species remaining to attract tourist interest • Increasing development • Not as well developed as Yercaud/ Hogenakal for facilities • Whatever changes are made in Vathal malai are mimicked by other destinations to compete and gain tourist attention • Lack of information amongst public about Vathal Malai • Villages coming across as remote and backward areas of the district.

TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY

- The roads connecting Vathal Malai from the Dharmapuri district headquarters had to be widened to enhance transportation.
- There is a need for public transportation in Vathal Malai. This could be devised by,
 - Increasing the number and frequency of Inter mediate public transport for the people in Vathal Malai.
 - The Forest department should regularise the tourists at the foothills of Vathal Malai and take the tourists to Vathal Malai in government allotted jeeps or mini vans.
 - This helps in prevention of extensive pollution and also protection and maintenance of the place.

PROPOSALS AND STRATEGIES FOR ECO TOURISM IN VATHAL MALAI



Source: Based on google earth, District forest cover 2017

CULTURAL AND ECO TOURISM

- The Kite flying festival of the local community can be used as a tourist attraction
- The forest department has proposed to provide trekking tracks and cycling tracks for the tourists in the area.
- The botanical garden should include the endangered flora species as part of conservation and awareness.
- Malaiyali culture still exercise traditional practices (primarily because there are no alternatives) which could be of interest to tourists.
- There are several potential points of cultural interest to tourists and these include:
 - The cultivation and preparation of natural grains - chamai and ragi - using traditional tools
 - Traditional practices, such as the collection of rock honey; traditional trades, such as blacksmiths
 - Traditional methods not in use by others due to modern technology traditional tattoos which adorn the tribal women only (now only found among the older generation).

1 Site for Kite flying festival



2 Vathalmalai Lake



ECONOMIC VIABILITY

- The accommodations are already proposed and under construction. Apart from that, the forest department has proposed green houses for tourist accommodation.
- The forest department has also proposed to employ the local community to desilt and revive the Vathal Malai lake for boating and site- seeing.
- The medicinal plants garden which is under construction by the forest department, has to employ local villagers for tourist guidance, maintenance, surveillance and security.

RESOURCES FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

Traditional blacksmith at work Traditional method of removing husks



Traditional method of cleaning pulping coffee Traditional tribal tattoos worn by women

