

## Courtallam: The Spa of the South

Dr. S. Thanam

---

---



**Courtallam Water Falls**

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses various aspects tourism relating to Courtallam water falls located in Tirunelveli District of Tamilnadu, India. Courtallam region located in the Palani range of Western Ghats has nine water falls, accessible to tourists. Hundreds of thousands of tourists visit these falls every year and take baths in these water falls to enjoy the beautiful scenes of nature and to receive medicinal values through their baths. The paper presents the aspects of medical tourism pursued in Courtallam.

**Key words:** Courtallam water falls, medical tourism, herbs.

## **Introduction**

Courtallam, ‘the Spa of the South’ is situated in the Palani range at an elevation of about 167 meters on the Western Ghats. The temperature that prevails here is moderate and cool. Most of the region of Courtallam receives the rainfall during the month of October to January with the onset of the north east monsoon.<sup>1</sup> Courtallam, “the spa of the South” is a boon to Tirunelveli district, Tamilnadu.

## **Meaning of SPA**

International Advanced Deluxe Dictionary gives the meaning of spa as follows. Spa is a place where there is mineral water. In general it is a place where there is a spring of mineral water having medicinal properties. The Western Ghats forest which is found in the region of Courtallam possesses botanical wealth rich in medicinal value.

## **Courtallam and Medical Tourism**

The endless scope of ‘Medical tourism’ in Tamil Nadu is largely because of its diverse topography and climate on land and water. In Courtallam a variety of plants, trees and medicinal herbs are found in plenty.<sup>2</sup>

## **Uniqueness of Courtallam**

Courtallam is in TamilNadu state and is a wonderful tourist spot in Tirunelveli district. It is 9 km from Tenkasi railway station. On the Southern Railway it is connected by Virudhunagar-Tenkasi chord line. The town is connected to all the important main roads. It is a well-known and excellent health resort.

## **Historical Perspective of the Study Area**

According to Archaeological Survey information, the study area begins with the Microlithic age. The Microlithic civilization flourished in the area by 4000 B.C. The burial urns unearthed in Courtallam show the existence of the Megalithic people here. This may be dating back to 500 B.C. or a little later.<sup>3</sup>

## **Objectives of the Study**

- ❖ To highlight the natural resources which refresh a human being.
- ❖ To create awareness about the medicinal value of the waterfalls of Courtallam.

- ❖ To promote health tourism in Courtallam, a hill resort.
- ❖ To safeguard the natural resources for future generations.
- ❖ To explore the historical background of Courtallam.

## **Nine Water Falls**

Courtallam is a synonym of waterfalls. The river Chittar and its tributaries during their course make nine waterfalls. The falls of Courtallam originate from Pothigai hill. 'Pothigai' literally means a place where many things have been concealed. The spa of the South situated at an altitude of 167 meters on the Western Ghats just beside the Shenkottah gap in the range known as 'Aariyangavu pass'.<sup>4</sup>

The picturesque surroundings with the backdrop of cloud capped spurs of the Western Ghats lend an unusual charm to the falls. The chill water of the falls, water of Courtallam gives thrill and fun to the people along with physical satisfaction.

The rapturous scenes of the falls get heightened by the cool breeze that wafts in during seasonal months, from June to September. From February to September the sky becomes clouded with mild drizzle which is very enjoyable to all the ages.

From the last week of May onwards, the special rain which is called "Saral Mazhai" starts. It is considerably good for all living beings; Courtallam falls has medicinal properties, Since the water runs through forests of herbs and the water has therapeutic value and cure physical ailments.<sup>5</sup>

The waterfalls of Courtallam pour down torrentially with varying velocity and force. During the seasonal months the cool breeze along with the intermittent drizzle and sunlight heightens the rapturous scene of the falls. Some of the falls are of 90 feet height. They are Main falls, Chitraruvi, Shenbagadevi falls, Thenaruvi, Five falls, Orchard falls, New falls, Tiger falls and Old Courtallam falls.

## **Bath, Medicinal Value**

During the season times, thousands of tourists from far and near visit this falls from dawn to dusk. The special significance of taking bath here at any time in a day would not bring people sneezing or cold as the water is said to possess medicinal qualities. A lengthy

stay at Courtallam cures the rheumatic pain, chronic headache, nerve disorder and the like. Trekking facility is also available here, and it promote health condition.<sup>6</sup>

The waterfalls in Courtallam not only have charm but also contain medicinal value. The force of the waterfalls over the body tones up the muscles and nerves and cures physical ailments. Courtallam is the only place in Tamil Nadu bestowed with natural and medical properties in all areas from hill top to the floor.<sup>7</sup> The natural habitat of diverse flora and fauna spread over acres of evergreen forest. The rugged terrain of this land, harbouring a fragile eco-system packs plenty of adventure activities. Nature trails dotted with delightful waterfalls and enchanting picnic spots attract naturalists, conservationists, sick people and adventure seekers. With its forests and falls it provides the perfect background for leisure activities.<sup>8</sup>

### **Dense Forests**

Amazing dense forests, awesome hills, wonderful atmosphere, a variety of natural herbs and gigantic waterfalls here attract different kinds of people. Bathing in the waterfalls of Courtallam nourishes the mind and soul.<sup>9</sup>

### **Herbal Medical and Healthcare Services**

At Courtallam, a person suffering from physical ailment is taken care of by the well trained staff providing guidance and information about the various facilities enabling one to experience the unique destination. They are well placed sign boards, direction jointers and information boards which facilitate people to explore the significant spots of this area. It is famous for herbal medicinal plants. The Department of forest conserves the rare herbs in and around the Courtallam area. There is a strong belief that taking bath in the falls of Courtallam, one can get cured of many diseases, especially skin diseases. So Courtallam is called “The spa of the South” because of its climatic conditions at par with the city of spa at Belgium.

In Courtallam tourists can avail of a wide variety of medical and healthcare services from rejuvenating Ayurvedic and Yoga massages. The tourists seek to mix health care and holiday pleasure. They acquire medical benefits by taking bath in the falls and also utilize various therapies that can be found only in very few places like Courtallam. People from all over the world visit here to enjoy traditional therapies like Yoga, Meditation, Ayurveda,

Siddha and other traditional systems of medicine. Just residing in this area provides remarkable pleasure to both mind and body, and hundreds of people with various ailments realize this fact.<sup>10</sup>

### **Endemic Species of Plants**

The unique feature of Courtallam is the occurrence of numerous endemic species of plants. The following are some of the species: Aglaie elalnoiba, Banth, Var, Bourdilloni. Among the large number of endemic herbs, shrubs and climbers allocated to this area, are Piper Barberi, Camble senerio, Calcudensis and Ramas. Some of the rare species in Courtallam cannot be found in any other place in TamilNadu.<sup>11</sup>

### **Forest Management**

A significant aspect of the forest management of the district which needs mention is the step taken by the government to conserve the rare medicinal herbs in and around Courtallam. This is the only place which has been bestowed with such natural resources. A lengthy stay at Courtallam cures ailments like rheumatic joints, chronic headaches and nerve disorders.

Apart from being an important picnic spot and popular for its natural beauty and salubrious climate, the falls here attract the tourists as a well as the people who suffer with numerous physical ailments.

### **Medical Plants and Herbs**

Courtallam is known for its medical plants and variety of herbs. The Aromatic plants like patchouli, sureachbasis, lemongrass and litronella are some of the plants which grow here. Cinnamon Kaempferia known as Kacholam, Sugandhavacha are some of the plants that exist in the hills of Courtallam. The sacred basil which has been regarded as a holy plant is often used in home remedies. It rejuvenates the mind, keeps the body resistant to diseases and its oil provides protection against Gamma radiation.<sup>12</sup> The essence of various medicinal plants mix with the water of the Falls which remains as a remedy to various diseases. People believe that the water has sacred value and consider it as holy because the water passes through Hindu salpheres.

### **Benefits of Bath in the Water Falls**

The water of Courtallam Falls has the capacity to cure tonsillitis, blood pressure, cough, cold, skin diseases, etc. Taking bath in the falls provides relief even to the lunatic patients. There are so many asylums which offer treatment to the mentally retarded. Every morning, the affected persons are taken to the falls for bath. The water here passes through lot of valuable medicinal herbs and it has the capacity to cure such ailments.<sup>13</sup>

Courtallam is noteworthy for its climate, scenic beauty and provides a holy atmosphere. People can witness the panoramic view of Courtallam hills while they are taking bath in the falls. The areas in Courtallam are very beautiful with verdant forest and plantations. The soaring hills form a magnificent backdrop to the serene rural setting. The eco-system provides the ideal habitat for a huge variety of bird species. Unknown flowers, trees, plants add to the beauty and importance of this place.

## Conclusion

Courtallam, the ‘Spa of the South’ is special in so many aspects. It highlights the uniqueness of the water falls which possess medicinal value. This spot reduces tension and facilitates peace and harmony to the afflicted as well as the healthy person. Protection and restoration of this valuable region will favour sustainable tourism development.

=====

## References

1. Velmani, K.S.K., Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu, Tirunelveli District, Vol.11, 2002, P.11.
2. Forest coverage report, Tamil Nadu forest Dpartment, 1990, P.39.
3. Sivarajapillai, K.N. The Chronology of the early Tamils, Asian educational services, New Delhi 1984, 179.
4. Romila Chawla (ed.) Tourism in Mountain Areas, Sonali Publication, New Delhi, 2005, P.142.
5. M. Gopalakrishnan (ed.) Gazetteers of Tamilnadu state – Government Publication 1993, P.186.
6. Report of the Western Ghats conservation society, Web page: 2.
7. Field visit to Courtallam on 14.03.2015.
8. Interview with L. Loganathan, Tourist guide on 14.03.2015.
9. Tamilnadu – A land of Enduring Heritage – Dept of Tourism 1999.

10. Interview with P. Nagarajan, Taturopathy doctor, Courtallam 15.03.2015.
  11. Interview with G. Gangadharan, physiotherapist, Courtallam – 15.03.2015.
  12. Sarma K.V.S. Environmental Geo Scientific studies of the Desertification in parts of Tirunelveli and V.O.C. District, Tamilnadu, Geological Survey of India, Government of India, 1987, P.9.
  13. Report of Gopalan and A.N.Henry, Botanical Survey of India, Coimbatore 19th January, 1993.
- 

Dr. S. Thanam  
Associate Professor in History  
A. P. C. Mahalaxmi College for Women  
Tuticorin 628 002  
Tamilnadu  
India  
[thanamkamaraj2014@gmail.com](mailto:thanamkamaraj2014@gmail.com)