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Prospects of Cemetery Tourism in Kerala and Dutch Cemeteries

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Cemetery Tourism:

Cemeteries have become a product of special interest tourism in recent days with many countries promoting memorials, cemeteries, graveyards to attract tourists to trace roots or pay homage to their heroes. This can also be considered as tourism that falls under the category of dark tourism associated with tourists visiting places associated with death and disaster. Many families can trace their ancestors who were buried in a land far from their home. Cemeteries have also become an attraction based on its cultural and heritage value. Cemeteries contain attractive and sometimes unusual tombs, grave stones and architecture which are linked to the culture and heritage of the country. The ancient graveyards also used arts and symbols on older tombs and graves which have a cryptic or hidden meaning. These symbols are different and vary from countries to countries and tourists may get the opportunity to interpret and understand these symbols to identify facts and stories about the buried person. An interpretative guiding tour or programme could be developed as part of the cemetery tourism. The interpretative programme may include gravestone art/designs, gravestone carvers and masons, historical past of the communities, social stories and conflict, funeral practices etc. While doing such interpretative packages, prior permissions need to be taken from the authorities of the cemetery, assessment of how many people could be accommodated at a time and special care should be taken that the programme does not make conflicts with the local community as the place have strong emotional ties.

Although cemetery tourism is common in many foreign countries, it is not that popular in India. But tombs of ancient rulers have been developed as monuments with exotic gardens and parks which attract many domestic and international tourists. Couple of years back, the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board announced Cemetery tourism by naming "Know Your Roots" and started data collection about graves of renowned people from across the world who made their home in the hills and died there. It is estimated that thousands of British citizens lived in the state before independence and the graves of many prominent personalities like John Lang, who was the lawyer of Rani Laxmi Bai, eccentric entrepreneur 'Pahari' Wilson and his Garhwali wife. The Department also started making efforts to contact the descendants of these people, history lovers and foreign tourists who visit these graves (Vasudevan, Vijayakumar and Roy, 2017).