Developing an Integrated Tourism Circuit in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati in the State of West Bengal, India.

A Pioneering Initiative of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur, Dist: Hooghly, West Bengal, India.

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While carrying out my Research Work, I have derived great inspiration from the monks of the Ramakrishna Order at every step. As such, my special thanks go to them and whatever merit this Tourism Project might have, it is all due to their unfathomable zeal and enthusiasm.

My sincere thanks to the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur, West Bengal for providing me with the rare opportunity to conduct the Research Work on the Integrated Tourism Circuit.

In this regard, I extend my gratitude to Pradeep Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur for providing me with a host of author benefits like free access to the library at the Institute of Culture, easy access to senior monks of the Mission etc…It was largely due to his initiative that I was provided with informative literatures that offered me with significant insights on the “Ramakrishna Movement”.

My appreciation of the complex nature of Tourism has been to a large extent shaped by my career as a Travel Writer as well as by my direct involvement in the Tourism industry. As a Travel Writer, I have had the good fortune to travel the entire length and breadth of this great country, which in turn has brought me in touch with the crème de la crème of India’s tourism industry. I owe a debt to all my colleagues who are working in various capacities in India and other parts of the world.
I am also grateful to the various Travel publications like Voyage, Discover India and numerous other In-Flight magazines of airlines that operate from India for providing me with the rare opportunity to pursue a profession that I truly cherish.

Sincere thanks to anyone who deserves credit but fails to appear in that list.

Subhasish Chakraborty
Preface

The Project entitled – “Developing an Integrated Tourism Circuit in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati in the State of West Bengal” has been prepared on behalf of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur, West Bengal in view of the Mission’s eagerness to develop an appropriate Tourism Plan for native villages of Sri Ramakrishna and his Holy Consort – Sri Sarada Devi. The Mission believes that by harmoniously blending Spiritual Tourism with Rural Tourism, quality visitors can be attracted to the fascinating villages of Joyrambati and Kamarpukur.

The underlying theme of the Project is “Sustainability” of the tourism phenomenon by involving the local community from the grass roots level and empowering them with the right to make conscious decisions for the long-term sustainability of tourism in the concerned villages. Due importance has been given to the emancipation of women so that they are provided with avenues that would ensure a better quality of life by being involved with avenues that would ensure a better quality of life by being involved in the rural tourism industry.

The Project offers solutions as to how the local community can live in harmony within their environment by meeting the needs of the present without crippling the needs of the future generation. Conservation of existing resources and the simultaneous up gradation of resources for the future generation are the cornerstones of this Project.

The environmental problems facing the world are of such great magnitude that it is not just the government – local or central whose cooperation is required. There is always the need for involving the entire community and all the individuals to contribute positively if we are to survive on planet earth.

Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit has to be human. After all, one of the greatest human exemplar of “Living in Harmony with Nature” was...
Sri Ramakrishna himself. Thus, it would be in the fitness of things that his native villages acts as a torch bearer of “Sustainable Rural Tourism” in West Bengal and show the path of eternal bliss and tranquility through a tourism phenomenon, which is rooted in the platform of sustainability. By going back to nature, we are in no way hindering our spirit of self discovery. Rather, we are only consolidating the ground for the future generation to flourish.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit has for long remained neglected. As per the strategy of the “Tenth Plan”, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has highlighted the need to stimulate investment and encourage the various State Governments to develop “Integrated Tourism Circuits” based on India’s unique civilization, heritage and culture in association with the state governments, private sector and other miscellaneous agencies.

It is my earnest hope that this tourism project will pave the path towards the development of “Sustainable Rural Tourism” in one of the most fascinating rural backdrop of India. I am optimistic that every tourist who visits the circuit will go back home physically rejuvenated, mentally stimulated, culturally enlightened and spiritually surcharged.

Subhasish Chakraborty
Project Fact File

Name of the Project: “Developing an Integrated Tourism Circuit in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati in the State of West Bengal”.

Place of Site: (i) The scenic natural vistas of Gar Mandaran or Fort Mandaran in the district of Hooghly, West Bengal.

(ii) The ancestral village of Sri Ramakrishna at Kamarpukur in the district of Hooghly in West Bengal.

(iii) The ancestral village of Holy Mother Sarada Devi in the district of Bankura in West Bengal.

Distance Calculator: All the three above mentioned tourist sites are within a radius of 50 Kms. In fact, the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati are separated by mere 3 miles from each other. While Gar Mandaran is just 1.5 Kms. from holy Kamarpukur.

Project Concept:
Gar Mandaran with its scenic natural vistas is an idyllic picnic spot and is most renowned for the ruins of an ancient fort – Mogli Fort, a major part of which is beneath the ground. The entrance to this fort is through the Orissa Gate. The fort needs to be thoroughly revamped and restored to its former glory.
If one travels a further 2 Kms. from Mogli Fort along the meandering walking trail, one will come across a small hillock, on top of which is located the Darga of Gazi Sahib. Pilgrim tourists often climb on top of the hillock where the tomb of Ismail Gazi who served as the Chief of Hussein Shah’s army. The tomb of Ismail Gazi attracts visitors of all faiths who offer their prayers and lit candles for their well being.

The dreamy landscape of Gar Mandaran is further accentuated by the shimmering Damodar River that flows by perennially and the majestic Mogli Fort hillock on the banks of river Damodar provides a fascinating natural backdrop.

A little distance away are the sparkling water bodies like Kajla Dighi (water reservoir) and Lakshmijala Lake, both of which are ideal for boating and soft water sport activities. In fact, boating facilities are presently available at Lakshmijala Lake but is at a nascent stage.

The villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati being the native places of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi are amongst the most holy places of pilgrimage in the state of West Bengal. These two villages are not only visited by pilgrims from India but a large number of visitors from abroad too pour in during the peak touristy season in search of inner peace and tranquility.

In both the villages, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission have centers that are run and administered by Belur Math, the worldwide headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission. Apart from preserving the sanctity of the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi by way of ritual worship, discourses on religion and celebrating important festivals like the Durga Puja, Kali Puja etc… there are numerous other philanthropic services rendered by the Ramakrishna Math & Mission by way of providing primary and vocational education, free medical check up, upgrading rural livelihood etc… all of which aims at the development of the rural folks.
A vast majority of the village folks are poor and their primary source of income is agriculture. Both the villages present a sad tale of retarded growth and their rich heritage, both natural and cultural too seems threatened.

The principal goal of this Tourism Project is alleviation of poverty through eco-friendly tourism that is sustainable in nature. The project aims at contributing positively to the eradication of poverty in all the three tourist spots of the circuit and keeping this in mind the project will be pro-poor, pro-rural folks and pro-women, all of which will enable the benefits accrued through Tourism to reach the grass roots level workers of the tourist circuit.

This Tourism Project also envisages to enhance not only the religious and spiritual heritage of the villages but also developing a form of tourism, which would be community oriented and fully sustainable in nature.

The project aims at developing world-class tourist infrastructure like Tourist Information Centers, high quality way side amenities, folk museums, craft bazaars as well as renovating the age old temples and monuments that are closely connected with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi.

Overall the Project envisages social stability, improvement in the working capacity of communities and extending the right to leisure and recreation to the least privileged sections of the society.

A revolutionary change is sweeping the world of tourism. A new breed of travelers who are better educated with more disposable income and living a high standard of life is compelling the tourism industry to constantly re-invent itself with more and more innovative tourism products.

One such new age tourism product is “Rural Tourism”. It’s a fact that more than 70% of India’s population lives in villages and according to the connoisseurs of Tourism, there is
more authentic innocence in the villages of India rather than the cities, which look Dickensian.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit has a unique traditional way of life, rich in culture, crafts and folklore all of which would be of great interest to the discerning international traveler. The project envisages a two way exchange between East and West that would go a long way in broadening the mental horizons of both the visitors as well as the local village folks.

On successful implementation of the Project on “Integrated Rural Tourism” a lot of superstitious ideas and beliefs, barriers and prejudices will be broken through this unique style of tourism.

Objectives of the Project:

(i) To preserve the heritage and rural environment of the circuit.
(ii) To promote Rural Tourism which is sustainable in nature for revenue generation.
(iii) To contribute positively towards the overall economic development of the circuit through Tourism’s multiplier effect.
(iv) To provide a variety of experiences both cultural and environmental to the discerning tourists.
(v) To act as a model for Rural Tourism development in the state of West Bengal.
(vi) To undertake the development of agriculture and fisheries sector and ensure increased production.
(vii) To improve the socio-economic condition of the local cultivators and fishermen and promote nature based tourism activities like Fishing / Angling and Farm Tours.
(viii) Support the locals through financial grants and loans, purchase of equipments, feeds and vehicles and impart training on the beneficial affects of Rural Tourism as a method of revenue generation.
Tourism in West Bengal – An Overview

West Bengal is a land of stupendous dimensions with a rich cultural tapestry, undulating mountains, spectacular beaches and haunting wildlife. There are few states in India with the enormous variety that West Bengal has to offer. And it’s a state, which somehow gets into your blood. Love it or hate it, you can never ignore Bengal.

Kolkata being the capital city is vast as it is crowded and as luxurious as it is squalid. There are the plains that are as flat and featureless as the Himalayas (Darjeeling, Kalimpong etc…) are high and mighty. There is the world famous Sunderban Forest Reserve, which is the home of the rare and endangered Royal Bengal Tigers.

West Bengal is far from being the easiest tourist destination in India to travel around. At times it can be hard going. The poverty will get you down and bureaucracy would try the patience of even a Hindu saint and the most experienced travelers find themselves at the end of their tempers at some point in Bengal. Yet it’s all worth it.

Basically Bengal is what you make of it and what you want it to be. If you want temples, there are temples in profusion and enough styles and types to confuse anybody. If it’s history you want, Bengal has plenty of it and the monuments, ruins and battlefields all have their tales to tell. If you want to simply lie on the beach, there are enough of those to satisfy the most avid sun worshipper. If walking and the open air is your thing then head for the trekking routes of the Himalayas, some of them are as wild and deserted as you could ask for.

A visit to Bengal is not something that you clinically see. It is a total experience.

Even though West Bengal is blessed with a variety of tourist products, the state hasn’t been able to tap its inherent tourism potential. Today, in terms of tourist arrivals, West Bengal is at the bottom level as compared to its counterparts like Kerala and Rajasthan.
The state’s most hallowed river – “Ganga” is now heavily polluted and the city of Calcutta is literally bursting at the seams with every bit of space being occupied to build concrete structures.

The entire tourism industry in West Bengal needs to work cohesively towards restoring its rich heritage and preserve its nature and environment. The environment is all of us, our bread and butter and its nature that makes life on earth possible. We need to address this vicious transgression of nature immediately and restore West Bengal’s natural and historical past.
At a time when the Ramakrishna Math & Mission with its headquarters at Belur Math is on the verge of making its presence felt in the competitive international tourism landscape, it is imperative to cast a glance at modern India’s foremost tourism ambassador – the one and only Swami Vivekananda.

Let us remind ourselves that the genesis of Ramakrishna Math & Mission traces its origin to the untiring efforts of Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who made his mark on the world stage with his soul stirring speech as an ambassador of Hindu religion in the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in the year 1893. This unheard of monk was for all practical purposes India’s first tourism ambassador to the West and keeping in sync with his Master’s philosophy of –“Harmony of World Religions”, contributed admirably towards enriching the overall spiritual consciousness of the Western world.

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission believes that Swami Vivekananda’s mission of “Harmonious Cultural Synthesis Between India and the Rest of the World” is an ongoing process and see the present world tourism scenario as an opportunity to showcase the very best of India’s 5000 year old spiritual heritage. As the Ramakrishna Math & Mission plunges dedicatedly on their mission to take the new age traveler on a journey of discovery, courtesy the Integrated Tourism Circuit of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati, it is of utmost importance to draw some strength and vitality out of Swami Vivekananda’s forays in the world of tourism.

Today we are facing the age of great transformation, caused by the end of World War III. Everybody is well aware of the consequences of World War I and II; however, the other important war that many people have not yet come to recognize is the Cold War between the East and the West, which is what the World War III was all about. There are many
phenomena occurring in this rapidly transforming world and at the same time we are facing another crisis, that is, the beginning of World War IV.

The Second World War was fought between the fascist regimes and the free world and the Third World War was the fight between the East and the West. Now the Fourth World War might be fought between the North and the South. Under this situation, the global community is trying to build a “New World Order” and the United Nations is at the center of this movement. The Ramakrishna Math & Mission feels that the “New World Order” will not be established by the United Nations alone.

The world is grappling with millions of problems and searching for a new civilization; otherwise we might face a very dangerous era in the coming decades. Modern civilization is based on mass production and mass consumption. If the people of the industrialized countries continue with their present life style as they do today, then by mid 21st century we will have used up all of the resources available. On the light of the above observations, what the world really needs is the creation of a totally new civilization, which can supersede the modern civilization. Now who will take the initiative in creating such a new civilization?

Drawing succor from Swami Vivekananda’s predictions, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission believes that the new civilization will be created by Asian countries. The economies of USA and Europe are on the decline; however, the Asian economies are rapidly expanding and growing and all the leading international organizations like the United Nations, The World Bank, The World Trade Organization etc…. are unanimous in their opinion that in the 21st century Asia will continue to lead the global economy.

At least a century back, the great “Cyclonic Monk” Swami Vivekananda had predicted that Asia will lead the world not only in terms of economics but also in terms of culture and in the creation of a new civilization.
It is only logical to believe that an organization like the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, whose founder was Swami Vivekananda, to follow in his hallowed footsteps and in the process of creating a new civilization, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has identified tourism to play the role of a catalyst. The tourism industry has now grown into a global phenomenon, which has enough power to change the world.

Do we have to rely solely on politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, scholars or journalists to bring change to the world? As per the latest statistical data of the World Tourism Organization, by the year 2010, the number of tourists is expected to touch the magic figure of 1 billion. Even a decade back, the people from the “North Block” formed the bulk of the tourist traffic but now there seems to have occurred a complete role reversal as more and more people from the developing countries are also beginning to travel frequently.

With the advent of modernity, a new human breed has emerged whose beliefs correspond very little in the heritage of their forefathers. As a consequence, religion and spirituality – the kingpins of that heritage has been marginalized, both intellectually and politically. Progress has turned into something of a nightmare. According to Huston Smith, a leading figure in the study of comparative religions, “it is discouraging to discover that not only are we no wiser than our forefathers were; we may be less wise for having neglected value questions while bringing nature to heel”. Also, it is a fact that the three hundred year old tension between science and religion shows no sign of easing; for science continues to be what modernity believes in. Science still can’t deal with values and existential meanings.

Another aspect that humanity faces in the present times is religious disharmony. Though the truth of religious harmony has been affirmed and proclaimed by the enlightened few in every generation, humanity as a whole has not yet come to terms with it. In today’s world, religious differences still rankle and continue to produce disharmony, misunderstanding and mutual distrust.
Questions arise: How do we deal with all these differences? Would these vanish in course of time or are they here to stay? Are they in any way reconcilable? Is it possible to discover some thread of harmony connecting them? What is the significance of the presence of so many religious traditions in the history of the world? Such are the questions that every serious student of religion and spirituality has to reckon with.

It is here that the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, founded by the great Swami Vivekananda has to step in, courtesy the “Harmonious Approach” propounded by his Master Sri Ramakrishna, which was sermonized extensively in USA, UK and other parts of the world by Swami Vivekananda and his brother monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

Sri Ramakrishna’s “Harmonious Approach” developed not through scholarship but through direct spiritual experience. He did not set out to “prove” the harmony of religions. He was a God-intoxicated soul. Having tasted supreme, transcendent bliss as a result of intense longing for God as the Divine Mother, he became eager to know how God was worshipped in different ways. His all-consuming love for God made him take up the disciplines of different Hindu sects and also of other religions. This was a unique experiment and its results were extraordinary. Sri Ramakrishna found to his childlike wonder and joy that all these paths led to the ultimate awareness of God as the Supreme Spirit. Thus, through direct spiritual experience Sri Ramakrishna proved the equal validity of all religions. This led him to formulate the following three fundamental principles, which form the cornerstone of his “Harmonious Approach” to the phenomenon of religious plurality –

1. All religions have the same ultimate purpose, namely, God-realization; everything else in religion is secondary. Stripped of all theological trappings, every religion has for its goal the transcending of human limitations to contact the Reality beyond.
2. There is only one transcendent, ultimate Reality, which manifests in various forms, with various attributes, and even as formless, and is known by various names.
3. The Ultimate Reality can be realized through various ways developed by the world religions. Every religion has the inherent power to take its followers to the supreme consummation of human life.

Swami Vivekananda put it succinctly when he said in a lecture in USA – “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth”.

In another instance he explained the idea of “Harmony of World Religions” beautifully in a lecture he gave at the Universalist Church, Pasadena in the year 1900, which is quoted hereby – “Take four photographs of this church from different corners: how different they would look, and yet they would all represent this church. In the same way, we are all looking at truth from different standpoints, which vary according to our birth, education, surroundings and so on. We are viewing the truth, getting as much of it as these circumstances will permit, coloring the truth with our own heart, understanding it with our own intellect and grasping it with our own mind. We can only know as much of truth as is related to us, as much of it as we are able to receive. This makes the difference between man and man, and on occasions sometimes even contradictory ideas; yet we all belong to the same great universal truth”. How nice a summation for the doctrine of “Harmony of Religions”.

With the advent of globalization and India’s relentless march towards attaining the tag of a “Developed Nation”, India has become one of the most preferred holiday destinations as per the latest reports from the National Geographic Traveler and a slew of other renowned global travel publications. With the opening up of the Tourism and Civil Aviation industries, there has been a three fold increase in tourist traffic and tourists from affluent countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, France etc.…are increasingly opting for India as their preferred holiday destination. They are driven primarily by the element of “Exoticism” and India’s 5000-year-old spiritual heritage.
The Ramakrishna Math & Mission with its headquarters at Belur Math view the present tourism scenario as an opportunity to showcase the very best of India’s spiritual heritage and to take an active part in the formation of a “New World Order” based on the “Harmony of World Religions” as propounded by the Holy Trinity - Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission does not believe in talks or doctrines, or theories; nor is it sectarianism… It is the relation between soul and god. Religion does not consist in erecting temples or building churches or attending public prayer congregations. It is not to be found in books or in words, or in lectures, or in organizations. Religion consists in realization. Humanity must realize god, feel god, see god and talk to God. That is what is the essence of religion according to Swami Vivekananda.

To herald the dawn of organized tourism activity, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has chosen the pilgrim circuit of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati for extensive infrastructure development. To compliment the spiritual ethos of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, the concept of Sustainable Rural Tourism has been preferred as it is the best medium to promote ethical values common to humanity along with folklore, tradition and culture.
A Brief Account of Swami Vivekananda the Traveler:

During the period of Sri Ramakrishna’s illness (he was Cancer afflicted), a select band of young men had gathered around the Master and nursed him while at the same time receiving spiritual guidance from the Master himself. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in the year 1886, Swami Vivekananda along with his brother monks formed a monastic group and began to live together and performed severe spiritual austerities. In the initial days, they would wander about and beg food from the householders.

Gradually, each of the brother monks including Swami Vivekananda began leading a wandering life and were fast spreading to all the spiritual centers of India like Varanasi, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Rameshwaram, Kedarnath, Badrinath etc… Swamiji in particular traveled like there was no tomorrow. He sometimes traveled by train and sometimes on foot. It was during this spell of his travel as a wandering monk that he realized how pitiful was the condition of India in those days. The ugly specter of poverty, ignorance, superstitions etc… that prevailed in India during that time moved him greatly.

During his pilgrimages Swami Vivekananda also came in touch with royalty. Mention must be made of the Maharaja of Mysore and the Maharaja of Khetri. Swamiji was able to convince them about the need for educating the masses. The Maharaja of Mysore was the first to introduce free primary education in his state. But this wasn’t enough. Education had to be taken to the doorsteps of the peasants.

After Swamiji arrived in Madras (present-day Chennai), a group of young disciples gathered around Swamiji and pleaded with the great Swami to go to USA and attend the “Parliament of Religions” at Chicago in the year 1893 as an ambassador of Hindu religion. And the rest as we all know is history.

Swami Vivekananda made a tremendous impression at the Parliament of Religions and became an overnight celebrity. The unheard of monk from India was suddenly catapulted
into the league of a superstar. The Americans were absolutely swept off their feet by the Swami’s vast repository of knowledge pertaining to Eastern and Western culture, his unfathomable spiritual insight, eloquence, broad and sympathetic outlook as well as his handsome features.

The press and the paparazzi paid glowing tributes to Swami Vivekananda as an exponent of India’s spiritual heritage. The Western world suddenly realized that there must be something unique in this individual and gradually began to shed their earlier inhibitions about India and its civilization. They began to believe that after all the Indians were not as backward as they once thought and in terms of art, literature and culture were perhaps more advanced than the Westerners.

In the West, particularly in USA and UK, Swami Vivekananda’s mission was to correctly interpret India’s spiritual heritage with special emphasis on the relevance of the “Vedanta Philosophy”. His contribution towards the enrichment of the overall spiritual consciousness of the Americans is particularly commendable. During his visits countries like USA and UK, Swami Vivekananda undertook the daunting task of bringing a harmonious synthesis between India and the rest of the developed world, particularly Europe and North America as far as religion and science was concerned.

Presently India commands the respect and admiration of the whole world as a progressive nation. It was Swami Vivekananda’s hope that India would create a new “Social Order” and a new “Civilization” by harmoniously merging the very best of the nation’s spirituality with the latest technological advancements. He strongly believed that India would be rich both materially as well as spiritually.

Perhaps India as a nation has never witnessed a traveler, a true ambassador, more dynamic than Swami Vivekananda. His contribution to contemporary Indian Tourism as also tourism elsewhere in the world is unparalleled and unsurpassed even to this day in terms of the sheer impact that he created by his hallowed presence. A major portion of his
life was devoted to traveling and towards the later stages of his life, he desired to bring about a wonderful fusion between the East and the West. On one occasion, Swami Vivekananda himself was quoted as saying – “I am a Condensed India”.

It is only reasonable to imagine and expect that a truly world class Integrated Tourism Project be launched, through which his legacy and teachings are preserved for generations of travelers who will come to the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati pilgrim circuit in search of the “Elixir” which is elusive in today’s jet set modern era.

“ Hari Om Ramakrishna”
Overview of Gar Mandaran:

Gar Mandaran is a scenic village, which falls under the jurisdiction of Hooghly District and is part of the Arambag Municipality. It is a mere 6 Kms. drive from Arambag town and 1.5 Kms. from Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna.

Gar Mandaran with its scenic natural vistas is an idyllic picnic spot and is most renowned for the ruins of an ancient fort – Mogli Fort, a major part of which is beneath the ground. The entrance to this fort is through the Orissa Gate. The fort needs to be thoroughly revamped and restored to its former glory.

If one travels a further 2 Kms. from Mogli Fort along the meandering walking trail, one will come across a small hillock, on top of which is located the Darga of Gazi Sahib. Pilgrim tourists often climb on top of the hillock where the tomb of Ismail Gazi who served as the Chief of Hussein Shah’s army. The tomb of Ismail Gazi attracts visitors of all faiths who offer their prayers and lit candles for their well being.

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A little distance away are the sparkling water bodies like Kajla Dighi (water reservoir) and Lakshmijala Lake, both of which are ideal for boating and soft water sport activities. In fact, boating facilities are presently available at Lakshmijala Lake but is at a nascent stage.

Come winter and the water bodies of Gar Mandaran are replete with migratory birds that flock here from far off countries to breed in the favorable microclimate of Gar Mandaran’s wetlands. Although there is no proper Bird Watching facilities like Watch Towers, services of trained naturalists or hi-tech binoculars, yet the simple village folks take active interest in Bird Watching activities in their own traditional ways.
Other miscellaneous tourist attractions of Gar Mandaran are the exclusive Peacock Corner, a Deer Park as well as the former residence of Dewan Pir.

Apart from being blessed with unmatched natural beauty of rural Bengal, the surroundings of Gar Mandaran are replete with ancient temples. Mention may be made of the temple of Devi Malini as well as the temple of Saileshwar Shiva. The later is the creation of Ayesha Jagat Singh who is most renowned for being associated in Bankimchandra’s “Durgeshnandini” fame.

One of Bengal’s most delicious sweetmeat – the one and only “Chittaranjan Mithai” is still produced by the century’s old Sri Bishnupur Bhandar at Arambag town.
Overview of Kamarpukur

Kamarpukur in Brief:

The picturesque village of Kamarpukur is an idyllic village settlement and is surrounded with lush greenery that is ideal for rest and relaxation. This village comes under the Arambag Municipality in the district of Hooghly. It happens to be the birthplace of one of India’s most revered spiritual giants – Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He was born in the year 1836 in a poor Brahmin family.

Over the past many decades, this nondescript village of West Bengal has been attracting visitors and pilgrims from all over the world.

To the northern extreme of Kamarpukur is the scenic village of Bhursubo and it is believed that in the past a wealthy merchant named Manik Raja used to live here. He was instrumental in digging up the Sukhsagar and Hatisayer tanks.

To the West of the village is the Bhutir Khal canal which meanders its way through many twists and curves and ultimately culminates at the Amodar river which is located in close proximity to the village.

To the north eastern and northwestern part of the village is replete with two Hindu cremation grounds while on the eastern pat of the village there is a road that extends all the way to the state of Orissa.

There are also vestiges of the ancient Fort Mandaran as well as a splendid Shiva temple to the southeastern border of Kamarpukur village. Both of them have somehow been able to withstand the ravages of time.
For the Shaivaites, the ancient Tarakeshwar temple is located at a distance of 30 miles east of Kamarpukur. Other places like Ghatal, Vishnupur etc… are within driving distance from Kamarpukur.

**Tourist Attractions of Kamarpukur:**

**The Ancestral House of Sri Ramakrishna:**
In the beginning, the father of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa – Khudiram Chattopadhyay used to live in the village of Deerpur, which is in close proximity to the village of Kamarpukur. During those days, Kamarpukur and its adjoining villages were under the control of rich and wealthy landlords. One such tyrannical landlord was Ramananda Ray who appealed to Khudiram to provide false support in his favor. But Khudiram being a man of integrity and honesty refused the order of Ramananda Ray. Later on, the landlord filed a bogus case against Khudiram and won the case effortlessly and this resulted in his being able to possess the entire ancestral property of Khudiram, which was worth 150 Bighas.

Khudiram now had to face acute financial hardships due to the non-availability of land. During this period of crisis, a friend of Khudiram – Sukhal Goswani who hailed from the neighboring village of Kamarpukur offered him a few traditional hutments at his own farmhouse. Not only this, Sukhal also offered Khudiram a plot of land where he could engage profitably in agriculture. Khudiram thankfully appreciated his friend’s benevolence and started a new life at the village of Kamarpukur.

**Sri Ramakrishna’s Living Room:**
Sri Ramakrishna’s living room is presently an integral part of the temple of Sri Ramakrishna. During his childhood years, he spent most of his time at Kamarpukur and lived in this house. Sri Ramakrishna once advised his holy consort – Sri Sarada Devi not to give up Kamarpukur and go elsewhere for living. The Master wanted Sri Sarada Devi to spend her last few years in total peace in the tranquil environment of Kamarpukur. This is one reason why Holy Mother lived in that hut in spite of financial crunch.
The Temple of Shri Raghuvira:
In the past, the temple of Raghuvira was housed in a small sized hut, which was east facing. The floor and walls were made of locally available mud while the roof was made of the finest quality of straw. The new temple that has come up has been built at the exact spot where the old temple was positioned. Even the dimensions of the temple have remained unchanged in order to preserve the temple as it was in the days of yore. The temple is conspicuous by its stone emblem of God Raghuvira as well as the earthen jar, the Rameshwar Shivalinga, a figure of Gopala etc…

The South-Facing Hut:
Originally the South-facing hut used to be a single storeyed hut. But after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramlal his nephew added another storey to the hut and began living here. It is believed that Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had provided financial assistance to Ramlal for constructing the second storey. Presently this hut serves as a storeroom for the main temple.

The “Parlor” where Shri Ramakrishna used to meet the natives of the village is still preserved. The wooden door that extends all the way to the house can still be seen impeccably preserved at the original site. There is also a mango tree, which is believed to have been planted by Sri Ramakrishna that still bears fruits.

The Spot where Sri Ramakrishna was Born:
According to the English almanac, Sri Ramakrishna was born on the 18th of February, 1836, twelve minutes before sunrise. During that time, there used to be a shed here that was exclusively meant for the safekeeping of the husking machine. Besides there was also an oven meant for boiling paddy.

As soon as he was born, Dhani the nurse was busy attending to the mother. Later when she wanted to attend to the newborn Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) to her utter dismay Dhani lost sight of him and after frenetic searching found him in the oven and his body
was smeared with ash. This in itself was a clear indication that the newborn Gadadhar would lead a life of renunciation.

Today, at the exact spot of his birth the altar of the main temple has been built and since May 1st, 1951, the marble image of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is being routinely worshipped; On the altar one can find engravings of the husking machine, a fireplace as well as a lamp.

**Yogi Shiva’s Temple:**
The Yogi Shiva’s temple is ideally located to the north of Sri Ramakrishna’s dwelling unit. Legend has it that it was in front of this Shiva temple that his mother experienced a divine vision. One day while she was gossiping with Dhani the nurse, she all of a sudden saw a celestial light that emanated from the Shiva Linga and filled the entire temple with its rays and then entered her body.

**Haldar Pukur:**
The sparkling Haldar Pukur is ideally located to the northern part of the Yogi’s temple. It is basically a tank and in recent times this tank has been freshly dug up and two exclusive bathing ghats have also been constructed. The guesthouse too has been built in close proximity to the tank. In the days of yore, the simple village folks used this tank – “Haldar Pukur” for the purpose of drinking water, cooking and bathing. This tank is associated with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna’s youthful days.

**The House of the Lahas:**
In the good old days, the Goswamis were the landlords of Kamarpukur, but with the passage of time, it was the turn of the Lahas to become the landlords. The house of the Lahas is ideally located adjoining the house of Sri Ramakrishna. Presently the Lahas do not have the same financial clout which they once had and all that remains are the vestiges and remnants of their grand palatial edifices. Of particular significance are the prayer hall and the temple both of which are symbolic of the might of the Lahas.
The progenies of the Laha family live independently in a cluster of houses surrounding the temple of Sri Ramakrishna. The Lahas share memoirs of Sri Ramakrishna’s childhood days. Dharmadas Laha for instance was a close friend of Khudiram (Sri Ramakrishna’s father).

On the auspicious occasion of the sacred thread ceremony of Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna), it was with the financial assistance of Dharmadas Laha that Khudiram was able to conduct the ceremony. Prassannamayi, a widowed daughter of Dharmadas Laha who regarded Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) in high spiritual esteem.

**The Primary School of the Lahas:**
The Lahas were generous and kindhearted and they introduced a primary school and classes were regularly held in the large Natmandir right in front of the Laha’s house. A teacher was recruited to teach the children and incidentally Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) too joined as a student at the tender age of five years.

As a student he learnt to read and write in very quick time but thereafter he began to lose interest in studies. He was more interested in contemplation of the divine. Sri Ramakrishna’s mother assumed that something might be wrong with her child and so stopped Gadadhar from going to the school. Young Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) showed more enthusiasm on music recitals and dramas rather then learning from textbooks, which was downright boring to him.

**Temple of Gopeswar Shiva:**
The temple of Gopeswar Shiva is an ancient one and is ideally located to the eastern side of Sri Ramakrishna’s residence. Legend has it that when Sri Ramakrishna was used to be merged in divine ecstatic moods at the Kali temple at Dakhineswar, his mother went absolutely berserk when she heard the rumor that Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) had gone mad. Unable to hold back her tears and with a trembling heart she went to the Gopeswar temple where she prayed her heart out and performed hard penances to receive the divine
grace that would cure Gadadhar. During her fervent prayers she heard a voice directing her to offer her prayers to the Shiva temple at Mukundapur.

**Sitanath Pyne’s House:**
Sitanath Pyne was an average man and his house was strategically located to the southern end of the house of the Lahas. Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) used to frequent the house of Sitanath Pyne during his childhood days. It is believed that he used to experience ecstatic moods while singing Bengali devotional songs or reading scriptures like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata here.

The women folk began to worship him as the personification of Sri Chaitanya or in certain cases as Sri Krishna. On one occasion during the Shivaratri celebrations, the village folks decided to conduct a drama but as luck would have it, the person who was to play the role of Lord Shiva suddenly fell ill and in his place young Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) was asked to play that role. No sooner did he come on stage, all decked up with matted locks and ash smeared body, he went into a trance which lasted for a pretty long time and the drama ultimately had to be cancelled.

**Birth Place of Dhani Kamarini & the Temple:**
The birthplace of Dhani Kamarini is ideally located to the southeastern part of Sri Ramakrishna’s house. Of late a small temple too has come up here. The temple was built by a group of devotees. Inside the temple one will come across an exquisite oil painting of Dhani the nurse cuddling the child Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) in her lap.

Dhani Kamarani was a blacksmith by profession and she had the opportunity to serve Gadadhar right from his infant days. On one occasion young Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) had promised her that at the time of his sacred thread ceremony he would first accept alms from her. But as per the Brahminical rule, alms cannot be accepted from a non-Brahmin and justifiably Gadadhar’s (Sri Ramakrishna’s) elder brother Ramkumar objected to his proposal. But young Gadadhar wouldn’t budge an inch.
At last finding no other solution, Dharmadas Laha, who was a friend of Gadadhar’s father declared that although receiving alms from a non-Brahmin wasn’t in vogue, he was of the opinion that many respectable Brahmin families had in fact granted permission to do so and that one should not take the matter seriously. Thus what was supposed to be a dicey issue was amicably settled and Gadadhar was once again happy and contended.

Birth Place of Chinu Shankari:
Chinu Shankari, popularly referred to as “Chinu” was born in a mediocre family but his devotion to God was exemplary. No wonder that he had such a close relationship with Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna).

Chinu had faith on Gadadhar and he had no doubt in his mind that he was the personification of God on earth. Chinu was unduly perturbed that he might die before he could observe the unfoldment of Gadadhar’s divine play (Leela).

On one occasion Chinu offered sweets to Gadadhar and prayed sincerely for his grace. Even after Sri Ramakrishna became an adult, he zealously kept his association with Chinu. After successfully completing his spiritual austerities, Sri Ramakrishna very often used to visit his native village of Kamarpukur and during those times the two spent a lot of time together discussing religion and spirituality to their heart’s content. Sri Ramakrishna was most impressed by Chinu’s devotion and his thirst for divine grace. Chinu’s house has now been acquired by Ramakrishna Math who have marvelously preserved the sanctity of the house.

The Budhai Moral Cremation Ground:
The Budhai Moral Cremation Ground is strategically located to the east of Kamarpukur. Sri Ramakrishna used to frequent this cremation ground during his period of intense “Sadhana” or spiritual austerities.
The Shiva Temple of Mukundapur:
The Shiva temple of Mukundapur is ideally located to the southwestern part of Sri Ramakrishna’s birthplace. On being directed by Gopeswar Shiva, Gadadhar’s (Sri Ramakrishna’s) mother used to frequent the temple of Gopeswar Shiva from where she received divine instructions to offer her prayers to the Mukundapur Shiva, which she accordingly did for the benefit of Gadadhar who many presumed had gone mad.

Gadadhar’s mother was convinced when her prayers were answered and Lord Shiva himself pacified her by declaring that her son was not mad but was behaving abnormally due to divine intoxication. With this verdict, Gadadhar’s mother became her own usual self. According to popular village folklore, from that time onwards, many people in distress got their prayers answered by performing penances and spiritual austerities at this temple.

The Cremation Ground of Bhutir Khal:
The Cremation Ground of Bhutir Khal is ideally located to the northwestern part of Sri Ramakrishna’s residence. Whenever Sri Ramakrishna visited his ancestral village after being absorbed in strenuous spiritual austerities at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, he used to visit this crematorium for contemplation and performing other religious rituals. An old banyan tree under which Sri Ramakrishna used to be absorbed in deep meditation during the night can still be found here.

Manik Raja’s Mango Orchard:
Manik Chandra Bandyopadhyay used to be a kind-hearted man and was renowned for his generosity and his charitable bent of mind. It was primarily because of his benevolent attitude towards the weaker sections of the poor that he was popularly referred to as the “Manik Raja”.

To the western side of Bhutir Khal, he introduced an extensive mango orchard for the benefit of the local residents. This picturesque garden was the playground of young
Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) and others of his ilk. Very often they would bunk classes and run to this isolated orchard and indulge in a whole lot of fun.

They took prominent interest on village dramas and enacted the performances, which they had seen earlier. Gadadhar was the leader and he played a leading role and also directed others. Village folks who happened to pass by the mango orchard were absolutely stunned by the fine acting skills of young Gadadhar. They were particularly charmed by his memory. Unfortunately the mango grove is no longer in existence. All that remains are just a few mango trees which in no way compares to the mango orchard of the past.
Overview of Joyrambati

Joyrambati village, the playground of Mother Lakshmi (Sri Sarada Devi) is ideally located in the district of Bankura and is 75 Kms. away from the City of Joy – Kolkata. Joyrambati is lush green and sparsely populated. There have been instances of famine and malaria attacks in other villages of Bankura. But the people of Joyrambati were always safely cocooned under the grace of Holy Mother.

On the northern side of the village there is a small open space. In a portion of that ground the peasants cultivated grains, sugarcane, pulses and different vegetables.

When you go past this land, you come across the shimmering river Amodar. It enters from the northern side and passes through the village of Joyrambati, taking a bend in the eastern side and forming the northern border of the village. On the other side of the river, there is a big village called Desra. Even when other rivers of West Bengal go almost dry in the scorching summer months, this small river flows by perennially.

Holy Mother Sarada Devi during her childhood days would often come to the Amodar river for a bath and regarded it like the holy Ganges river. The beautiful river running in curves has turned the northern part of this small village into two small islands. Of this, the northeastern part, which resembles like the back of a tortoise, is the burial ground. In this place shady trees like Peepal, Banyan and Mangoes are in abundance. The place is also filled with fragrance of flowers like “Gulanch” and “Bakul”.

On the eastern side of Joyrambati across the other side of Amodar River, there is a village called Tajpur; on the south is the village of Jibda; on the southwest is Masinapur and to the west is Sihore.

These surrounding villages are all located in close proximity to the village of Joyrambati and are not more than 2-3 Kms. from Joyrambati. In the earlier times as there were no marketplace at Joyrambati, the people of the village cultivated vegetables in their own
fields. Whenever they were in need of clothes or other necessities of life, they would go to Kuthulpur, which was located at a distance of a mere 5 Kms. to the north or to Kayaput at a distance of 4 Kms. or to Kamarpukur also 4 Kms. to the southeast.

Centered around the village of Joyrambati, there are numerous villages, which have the blessed association of either Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Places like Anur, Shyambazar, Sihore and Koalpara are worth visiting. It was while visiting the temple of Goddess Vishalakshmi at Anur that Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) was overpowered by the spirit of the Devi.

Shyambazar is hallowed by Sri Ramakrishna’s visit in the year 1875 when he stayed there for a week immersed in divine consciousness while witnessing the sankirtan of Gauranga.

Sihore is the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna’s aunt and also that of Holy Mother’s uncle. Since their childhood, both Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother had visited this place numerous times.

Between 1909-1919 in the course of her visit to Kolkata or return via Vishnupur, Holy Mother would stay at Koalpara for one or two days or sometimes at least for a few hours. Koalpara to the Mother was almost like her “Drawing Room” to quote in her own words.

Even though Joyrambati was not big in size and there were no landlords or aristocrats living there, people still got along with joy and merriment. Whenever possible, they would make arrangements for folk dance, drama and music. To rejoice in the music, the villagers would go there with a rolled mat in their armpit. Even today people of the village can be seen enjoying the sankirtan during the occasion of Durga Puja, Kali Puja and Sitala Puja.

There is a temple of Lord Dharma by the name of Yatra Sidhari in Joyrambati. This shows that once upon a time there was worship of God Dharma. One of the Triratnas of
Lord Buddha, Dharma in course of time became God Dharma and the worship of this deity is seen even today. Moreover, the Mukherjees, the family to which Holy Mother belonged worship God Dharma in the name of Sundara Narayana as their family deity.

The other deity of Joyrambati is the well-known Singhavahini. Durga Devi, enshrined in three small images, accepts the worship of devotees in fulfillment of their vows.

Above all this, Joyrambati is the birthplace of Holy Mother Sarada Devi. One can see the milk white dome and the insignia of “Ma” atop the brick temple built by the Ramakrishna Math & Mission from a distance. It reminds everyone that Joyrambati is a “Maha Peetha”. People come in large numbers, even from distant places like America to touch the sacred earth of Joyrambati and become blessed in total disregard of the inconvenience due to poor transport facilities.

**Tourist Attractions of Joyrambati:**

**Matrimandir:**
The magnificent temple – “Matrimandir” has been built in honor of Holy Mother – Sri Sarada Devi who was the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This temple has been built at the exact spot where Holy Mother Sarada Devi was born and it was in this spot that her father Ramchandra Mukhopadhyay had constructed his original residence. The Holy Mother’s marriage ceremony too was held here.

The Matrimandir is dedicated to Holy Mother Sarada Devi and was consecrated by Swami Saradananda on 19th of April, 1923. However, the white marble statue of the Holy Mother that we see today was installed much later in the year 1954. The temple also has a rather spacious Prayer Hall where devotees from far and near can be seen absorbed in deep contemplation. Inside the temple’s sanctum sanctorum, the sacred relics of Holy Mother have been preserved. Holy Mother is worshipped daily with all the rituals and offerings involved. The Shiva Linga (the stone insignia of Lord Shiva) which was discovered while digging the earth at this place is also well preserved and worshipped.
There is a metallic flag imprinted with the holy word “Ma” (Mother) on top of the temple’s white dome that is suggestive of Holy Mother literally inviting the weary traveler to come to the temple and receive her divine grace.

During the summer months (April-September) the temple is open daily from 4 AM to 11 AM and between 4 PM to 8.30 PM while in the winter season (October – March) it is open from 4.30 AM to 11 AM and in the evening between 3.30 PM to 8 PM.

**Puratan Bari (Old House) of Holy Mother:**
This was the original dwelling place of Holy Mother. This house is now under the supervision of Belur Math, the worldwide headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission. If historical records are anything to go by, Holy Mother is believed to have lived in this house for close to 52 long years from 1863 to 1915. Many persons received initiation as well as monkhood from her in this very house. Also, it was here that she began the worship of Goddess Jagaddhatri

**Natun Bari (New House of Holy Mother):**
With the burgeoning growth of the number of devotees who came here to visit Holy Mother, the Old House was found inadequate due to constraints of space. This was the reason why Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna bought a piece of land ideally located to the western side of a pond, popularly referred to as the “*Punya Pukur*” where he financed the construction of a house meant for Holy Mother in the year 1915-16.

The new house is conspicuous by its four mud-walled rooms and the roof was made of straw. Her living room has now been transformed into a temple with a portrait of the Holy Mother. The adjoining room served the purpose of a kitchen while the room to the reverse side of the kitchen was occupied by Nalini Didi, who happened to be a niece of Holy Mother. The last room, which is west facing is now protected by railings and this room was used by Holy Mother for the exclusive purpose of worshipping Goddess Jaggadhatri. Monks of the Ramakrishna Order like Swami Saradananda and Swami
Subhodhananda along with other devotees used to stay in this room during their visits to Joyrambati.

**Holy Mother’s Bathing Ghat:**
The shimmering Amodar River, which Holy Mother compared to the holiest of Indian rivers – The Ganga is located a little outskirts of the village of Joyrambati and takes a triangular shape that resembles to the back of a tortoise.

Along the side of the river there are numerous cremation sites, which reminds one and all of the transitory nature of our life on earth.

One of the greatest monks of the Ramakrishna Order – Swami Saradananda used to be immersed in contemplation under the shadow of the Amlak (Myrobalan) tree that existed here.

On the auspicious occasion of the festival of Goddess Annapurna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi is also ritually worshipped on the banks of this river at the spot where Holy Mother used to take bath. It was much later that a concrete Bathing Ghat was built at this spot.

**Singhavahini’s Temple:**
Legend has it that once Holy Mother while she lay before the temple and fasting to receive the divine grace that would cure her from an incurable disease which she was suffering for a long time, was blessed with the vision of the goddess Singhavahini who recommended curative medicines to her which cured her completely. Soon after her recovery from the illness, Holy Mother carefully preserved a small quantity of soil of this sanctified place in a small casket and used to partake it everyday. Such was her belief and faith on goddess Singhavahini.

Once awareness spread about the curative properties of the Singhavahini temple’s soil, the locals as well as visitors from outside began to arrive in even larger numbers to collect the soil.
The original old temple has been reduced to ruins unable to withstand the ravages of time and a new temple has been built where the goddess is worshipped daily. The façade of the temple is roofed for the benefit of the devotees.

The goddess Singhavahini along with her associates Sri Chandi and Mahamaya both of whom are symbolically represented in metallic pitchers have been positioned on an elevated platform while Goddess Manasa has been positioned on another exclusive platform.

Devotees throng this temple in large numbers especially on Tuesdays and Saturdays since these days are considered to be auspicious. During the Durga Puja festival, which happens to be the greatest festival of the Bengali people, goddess Singhavahini is worshipped with due reverence and solemnity for three consecutive days with numerous elaborate rituals and offerings. The descendants of Holy Mother continue to worship the goddess even to this day.

**Punya Pukur:**
The Punya Pukur which literally means the “Holy Pond” is ideally located to the eastern side of the new house of Holy Mother. The magnificent Matrimandir or the Holy Mother’s Temple is right in front of the pond. Holy Mother used to frequent this pond during her stay at Joyrambati.

**The Temple of Dharma Thakur:**
Dharma Thakur is the guardian deity of Joyrambati village. The deity has been installed in an exclusive thatched hut, the kind of hut that is found in abundance in this part of the world. The hut consists of two rooms and in each room the presiding deity is worshipped in two different names.

The temple is located in close proximity to the Punya Pukur. One of the rooms is conspicuous by the image of Dharma Thakur who is shaped like a tortoise. There is also
the deity of Sitala Devi and a stone insignia of Narayana inside the temple. Mother goddess Kali used to be ritually worshipped in the adjacent room.

Apart from the above-mentioned temple, there is another temple dedicated to Dharma Thakur by the name of “Yatra Siddhi Ray” who happens to be the family deity of the Ghoshs. This temple is ideally located to the extreme west of the village.

According to popular folklore, the tortoise shaped deity of Dharma Thakur was ritually worshipped due to the fact that the Hindu religion regarded the tortoise as one of the reincarnations of god and as such was ritually worshipped as God Narayana in this hallowed temple.

**Barujjey Pukur:**
Barujjey Pukur is essentially a pond and in the local parlance it is also referred to as “Tal Pukur”. The name “Tal Pukur” is generally used because of the fact that the pond in question is enclosed with a cluster of stately Palmyra trees. This pond is located to the southeastern fringe of the village. Holy Mother Sarada Devi used to collect drinking water from this pond. Often she also used to take bath here.

**Bhanu Pishi’s Residence:**
Bhanu Pishi’s residence is located in close proximity to the main temple (Matrimandir) dedicated to Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Bhanu Pishi was a close friend of the Holy Mother and was also blessed by the great Sri Ramakrishna.

Since both of them lived in the same village street, Holy Mother regarded her as her aunt, since it was the accepted societal norm that prevailed in the villages of Bengal in those days. She was married but the untimely demise of her husband compelled her to retreat back to her ancestral village of Joyrambati.

According to local folklore, Holy Mother during her youthful days used to often take refuge in this house to find some solace, as she had to bear the brunt of ridicule that
were directed at her by the natives who proclaimed that her husband Sri Ramakrishna was mad. Everybody in the village used to curse her as the lunatic’s wife. Finding no other alternative, she would silently move in to Bhanu Pishi’s house for solace.

As of today, there is nothing left of the house and the original site of the house has now been amalgamated with the main temple (Matrimandir).
USP of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist Circuit

According to Christopher Isherwood, who was the chief proponent of the Vedanta philosophy in the West and credited with popularizing the Vedanta movement in the US from the 1940s through the 1980s, in his tribute to Sri Ramakrishna unequivocally declared that the Ramakrishna Movement is a phenomenon. In his best selling book “Ramakrishna and His Disciples”, which he completed after visiting the ancestral villages of Kamarpukur, Joyrambati, the Dakshineswar Kali temple and other places associated with Sri Ramakrishna, he begins with an introduction thus – “This is the story of a phenomenon. I will begin by calling him simply that, rather than ‘holy man’, ‘Mystic’, ‘saint’ or ‘avatar’; all emotive words with mixed associations which may attract some readers, repel others”.

According to Isherwood, a phenomenon is often something extraordinary and mysterious. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi were both extraordinary and mysterious; most of all to those who were best fitted to understand them. A phenomenon is always a fact, an object of experience. That is how he approached the Ramakrishna movement.

In one of his moving accounts on his journey from Kolkata to the ancestral village of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, Isherwood was overwhelmed by the simplicity of rural Bengal and he states – “If you leave Kolkata airport early one morning on a West-bound flight, you will be able to have supper that night at Rome. If instead, you take a car to Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna’s birthplace, you will easily arrive in time for lunch. In the first case, you will have traveled well over four thousand miles; in the second, about seventy. Yet in one sense the shorter journey can be said to be the longer, because it takes you backward in time.

In spite of the backwardness of the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, devotees and pilgrim tourists from the Western world as also domestic pilgrims have continued to flock to this part of rural Bengal, braving pot holed roads, lack of electricity, lack of
sanitized drinking water, telecommunications and other bottlenecks in tourist infrastructure. The tourist circuit of Gar-Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati have changed little in appearance during the last hundred years and according to Isherwood – “If Kamarpukur has changed more than its neighbors, it is in having become an international center of pilgrimage with a modern temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. That is to say, it is less concerned with the possibilities of its future than with the great event of its past”.

The houses of these village hamlets are predominantly built of mud the roofs are made of thatch. The rural hutments are more often than not barren with just a single cot and a bunch of sleeping mats. The kitchen floors are still rubbed with cow dung as it used to be century’s back.

The village roads, although narrow, meanders through in a zigzag manner with sewerage gutters on either side. Except for the areas surrounding the Math & Mission at Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, power supply or electricity haven’t yet penetrated into the interiors of the villages. The well or the village pond still serves as the primary source of drinking water and these rain-feed ponds or reservoirs also doubles up as places for bathing and washing clothes.

These villages even if taken together is not large enough to find mention on the tourist map of India or for that matter the tourist map of West Bengal. The characteristic feature of these villages are that usually they will be shielded by groves of banyan trees or even mango orchards.

Most Western visitors are truly charmed by the sight of rice growing agriculture lands and the century’s old system of ploughing through Ox and Water Buffaloes.

However, with India positioning itself on the world stage, the winds of change are there for all to see. Due largely to the pioneering charitable-philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, public education, state-of-the-art healthcare system,
emancipation of women etc…are now a reality. And the slogans of democracy too are being heard in these miniscule villages.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist circuit offers all the simplicity of an Indian village along with the lofty ideals of Sri Ramakrishna’s philosophy of “Harmony of World Religions” and “Service to Mankind”.

Today stress, frustration and emptiness. Grief, loneliness and despair have become a global phenomenon. Those of us who have experienced any one of these know what a devastating effect it can have upon our lives. At such times our entire being sends out an SOS. Then we ask, “What Went Wrong?’ “Why me?’

Sri Ramakrishna believed that to find contentment, we must go to its source. – the Atman, the blissful self. His entire life was a living example of how one could attain the highest spiritual bliss or “Nirvana”.

The age old and time tested ideal of “Doing Good to the World with a Spirit of Worship and thereby paving the Path for One’s Own Salvation” (“Atmano Mokshartham Jagad Hitaya Cha”) is what drives the Ramakrishna Math & Mission’s spiritual-philanthropic activities. Through the manifold activities that range from discourses on the Bhagvad Gita by senior monks to holistic Ayurvedic healing therapies and local community activities to the mind elevating meditation sessions, an amazing array of new age survival strategies relevant to every generation is on offer in the sylvan surroundings of rural Bengal – the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati pilgrim tourist circuit.

This circuit is at once the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi and blends splendidly with the fascinating undisturbed, unpolluted and untainted rural bliss, which is the trademark feature of this tourist circuit. The circuit has the authenticity of rural India and an ocean of spiritual bliss that still attracts the crème de la crème of the world.
In the light of the above observations, it is only logical that an Integrated Tourism Circuit be developed for the new age traveler to undertake the journey of spiritual discovery from the place from where modern India’s spiritual regeneration or the great Indian Spiritual Renaissance began.
Fairs and Festivals of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist Circuit– A Living Culture

A Living Culture:
A customary presentation of West Bengal’s culture relates it primarily to a study of arts within the tradition bound parameters of style, chronology or schools. As a consequence, the creativity inherent in the culture and the throb of life as its central metaphor tends to recede to the background. The “Living Culture” is essentially this creativity, this throb. It manifests itself in myriad patterns, all related to a tradition that lives on.

Cultural Life in the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur Tourist Circuit:
The circuit has a strong local and regional flavor. Its rituals and reticences posses an underlying commonality. Viewed in its totality, the culture of Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur Tourist Circuit is bewilderingly diverse. But these varied traditions have profoundly influenced each other. Sometimes they merge. Sometimes they mingle inseparably. And in what has come to us as the “Living Culture” of the above-mentioned Tourist Circuit, the rural and tribal vernacular traditions have interacted quite meaningfully with the classical traditions.

Even under the incessant pressure of modernity and economically speaking, the compulsions of employment, the culture of this circuit has lived on. It must be stressed here that much of the “Living Culture” has survived outside of the academia and is in the form of art that is practiced by the people of this circuit.

For this reason, as also for its eternal values, tourism has an interest in the “Living Culture” though serious attempts to understand and document it have so far been lacking.

Fairs & Festivals – An Overview:
The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is best experienced through fairs and festivals. The glorious Bengal festivals and fairs are but a continuation of
India’s 5000 years old civilization. The fairs and festivals of this tourism circuit are “Unique” and one-of-a-kind to be found nowhere else in the world.

From the point of view of community participation and a vibrant social fabric, it is absolutely incredible to observe the manner in which the simple village folks of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit celebrate their fairs and festivals, despite the fact that 80% of the village folks live below poverty line and their only source of sustenance is agriculture.

Brendon Julian, an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna from far away Las Vegas who was at Kamarpukur last winter to observe Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday celebration (Thakur’s Tithi Puja) nicely sums up the mood of the festival thus – “I was awake all night and discovered from the window of my dormitory, rural people coming in busloads and some even took the ‘Bhootbhooti’ – a sort of mechanized auto-rickshaw, just to be at the venue and partake in the regalia. From the affluence of Las Vegas, where every second house has a millionaire, courtesy the booming casinos, to the simplicity and minimalism of Kamarpukur has been a journey of discovery, a journey that has taught me to be contented with the simple joys of life”.

The significant aspect of fairs and festivals of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is that as opposed to modern day conferences and conventions, they have a laidback ambience and an air of informality. The backdrop is ethnic rural Bengal, which makes the process of discovery and the celebration of life a spontaneous affair. The manner in which the simple village folks have been able to preserve their sense of originality is incredible.

The Bengali diaspora overseas too seems to have a penchant for the festivals and fairs of this tourist circuit. This has a lot to do with the sentimental and spiritual attachment that they have for the Holy Trinity – Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Their birthday celebrations are considered to be very auspicious and the typical Non Resident Bengali is only too happy to show their progenies who are very
soon going to don the mantle of future responsible citizens learn a thing or two about their heritage and the responsibility that they have towards preserving their heritage.

Be it the annual Durga Puja, the mother of all festivals for the Bengalees or for that matter the birthday celebrations (Tithi Puja) of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, the Nabo Barsho, Rabindra Jayanti etc… a myriad of colors, pomp, splendor, pageantry, ancient traditions, classical gaiety and precious moments of festivity and leisure is what makes the fairs and festivals of this tourism circuit unique and unparalleled.

Each festival is different from the other but collectively they form an immeasurably important fabric of the cultural life of the people of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit.

The USP of the festivals and fairs of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit lies in the fact that they are sheer aesthetic feasts in which nature, religion and people have blended harmoniously. It would not be out of place to find the Muslim community being involved in the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna as also the Hindus taking active part in the Id-Uz-Zoha festival of the Muslims. In fact the religious borders fade away and gives a whole new dimension of “Festivals Sans Borders” in this fascinating tourist circuit. They are age-old traditional festivals that has been celebrated by generations of Bengalees and yet continue to appeal to a worldwide clientele.

Consider for example the Durga Puja festival. With the onset of autumn in Bengal, the countdown begins for the Durga Puja to arrive – days of undiluted joy and merriment, fun and frolic, for the young and the old alike. Far more than just an annual religious festival, Durga Puja envelopes the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit as a celebration of life, of their culture, their customs and traditions, signifying a time for coming together, of reunion and rejuvenation and last but not the least, the season to love, share and care.
People of the entire neighborhood actively participate in the festivities. From the decoration and illumination of the Puja premises to the Prasada distribution and immersion of the idols, the entire Durga Puja festival is out and out a community affair.

Another instance of the celebration of Mother Goddess is the birthday celebrations of Holy Mother Sarada Devi, who is universally regarded as an incarnation of the all-powerful Mother Goddess Durga. Swami Vivekananda had once declared that Sri Sarada Devi is the living embodiment of Goddess Durga.

According to the President Maharaj of Joyrambati Ramkrishna Math & Mission, which is where Holy Mother was born and where a magnificent temple dedicated to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi has come up – “Devi does not belong to any one religion. Devi is that conscious power of God. A child is more familiar with the mother than with the father, because the mother is very kind, loving, tender and affectionate and looks after the needs of the child. The mother’s grace is boundless. Her mercy is illimitable. Her knowledge infinite; her power immeasurable; her glory ineffable; and her splendor indescribable. She gives you material prosperity as well as spiritual freedom.”

Thus, during the annual birthday celebrations of the Holy Mother Sarada Devi at Joyrambati, people lay bare their hearts to her with all the humility and make a total, unreserved and ungrudging self-surrender to Her is the splendid spiritual abode of Joyrambati. It is a joy to see devotees in lakhs repeat her holy name. Worship her with faith and unflinching devotion and chances are that they all live happily thereafter.

**Fairs & Festivals as PR Tools:**
Fairs and festivals serve as great PR tools for the concerned tourist destination and helps in depicting the destination’s rich cultural landscape in a rather profound manner. Not only this, fairs and festivals also leave an indelible mark on the people’s mindset since everything is presented live in front of the discerning audience, the impressions of which they carry with them to their respective countries and disseminate among their friends.
and relatives. Thus fairs and festivals serve as great word-of-mouth publicity, which is what the most effective PR campaigns of today are all about.

It is but natural on the part of the visitors from far away lands for whom time is precious and India’s geographical boundaries being sub-continental in dimensions, fairs and festivals provide the visitors with a much needed outlet where the rich diversity of the great Indian culture comes alive in a dazzling array of sights and sounds which captivate the discerning foreign visitors and he/she finds fulfillment in his/her trip to India.

Fairs and festivals if properly organized have the potential to generate enormous tourist traffic. The Pushkar Fair, the Jaisalmer Desert Festival, the Surajkund Craft Mela etc… have been hugely successful in generating a sizeable tourist traffic to India. In the initial stages, it has been observed that a large chunk of visitors visit the fair grounds out of an element of curiosity and having sampled the product first hand come out with a comprehensive touristy experience of the destination’s culture, heritage, traditions and folklore that depicts the concerned destination in all its fullness.

More than anything else, fairs and festivals help in projecting a destination uniformly over a period of time with very little contradictions and the underlying theme of India’s “Unity in Diversity” is very well sustained. And it is this “Unity in Diversity” which is what real India is all about and what the rest of the world knows India to be.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit with its amazing array of colorful fairs and festivals calls for a cohesive action at both the central and state level as far as the promotion of the indigenous fairs and festivals of this fascinating tourist circuit is concerned.
Relevance of Developing an Integrated Tourism Circuit in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati

There has been a long felt need of an Integrated Tourism Circuit covering the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit. The state of West Bengal has unique tourism attributes and there is a very rich potential for tourism that is sustainable and eco-friendly in nature. It is a state that is blessed with a diversified eco-system, a great historical past, unique cultural diversity and breathtaking natural beauty. But in spite of possessing a great many tourism assets, tourism as an industry hasn’t been able to sustain and evolve.

This tourist circuit is unique for the fact that there exists a harmonious blend of Cultural / Spiritual and Nature based tourism. Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi were born here and renowned international scholars of the stature of Romain Rolland and Max Muller have unequivocally stated in many of their scholarly works that modern India’s spiritual regeneration began with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna.

From the obscure village of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati on to the world stage, the Ramakrishna Movement is now a global spiritual phenomenon. This meteoric rise of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, despite the bottlenecks in terms of tourist infrastructure, with very little support of the government is the stuff of legends.

Apart from Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual legacy, this tourist circuit has a unique traditional way of life, rich in culture, crafts and folklore. Nature has blessed this circuit with a fascinating rural charm – marshy wetlands, verdant agricultural lands, shimmering rivulets and exotic tribals.

A revolutionary change is sweeping the world of tourism. A new breed of travelers who are better educated with more disposable income and living a high standard of life is compelling the tourism industry to constantly re-invent itself with more and more innovative tourism products. One such product is the “Sustainable Rural Tourism”, which is what this particular tourism project envisions.
Imagine the following scenario -

**Day 1:**
You get up from your bed, step on the rubber slippers. Perhaps, the next thing you do is to sip a cup of hot coffee; watch television and prepare yourself for a fixed routine. Your day starts by standing in a long queue for a bus, which tears the crowded traffic moving under the smog umbrella. Till the sun sets under the polluted horizon, you call it a day.

**Day 2:**
The birds chirp around your thatched mud hut at the village of Kamarpukur / Joyrambati and the tooling of the temple bells wakes you up. The cattle stray beside your mud hut with bells tied to their necks. You start your day with meditation and stretch your body with Yoga asanas, which is followed by specially cooked Vedic breakfast. You spend the entire day visiting verdant farmlands with farmers ploughing their fields with Ox and Water Buffaloes or visiting rural artisans organizing their artefacts. As the time passes on, you take a fishing rod to fish from a local pond. By the time it is evening, you watch the clear sky bidding goodbye to the day and you immerse yourself in contemplation of the divine at the temple of Sri Ramakrishna.

This is the dream, which every urban tourist aspires for, but they limit themselves to work and their squalor. However, to cater to the discerning needs of today’s jaded traveler, both the Central Government and the State Governments have undertaken a number of steps for the promotion of Sustainable Rural Tourism and developing Integrated Tourism Circuits.

Apart from meeting the aesthetic needs of the new breed of tourists, the introduction of Sustainable Rural Tourism in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit will offer immense benefits to the rural populace as well, which are enumerated below –

**Economic Benefit:**
Presently the rural economy of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati is in tatters. It needs urgent attention and through tourism the local economy can be made robust and
dynamic given the fact that tourism is known for its multiplier effect. The unemployment rate in this part of West Bengal is alarming, which is inclusive of the educated unemployed.

It has to be borne in mind that tourism being a service oriented industry, human labor remains the basic need. None of the technological progress achieved thus far has succeeded in rendering the human factor less indispensable in the tourism sector and the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit can make its employment scenario a lot better.

The large hinterland surrounding the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit is a rich source handloom and handicraft products. But due to the non-availability of a ready market, this indigenous craft industry is dying a slow death. Through Sustainable Rural Tourism these indigenous craftsmen can hope to sell their exotic products to the tourists and gain sizeable profits without the involvement of the middleman.

Introducing tourism calls for developing the infrastructure and the benefits of infrastructure investments justified primarily for tourism like transportation, accommodation, water supply, sewerage and other public utilities may be widely shared by the local entrepreneurs.

Overall, once the Integrated Tourism Project is successfully implemented, it will serve as a model for other similar circuits to be developed in the state of West Bengal in the form of a “Demonstrative Effect”.

**Cultural Benefits:**

Tourism in West Bengal remains basically a cultural phenomenon and the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit can hope for a stimulating cultural impact with the introduction of tourism. This circuit has remained in isolation for a long time and this isolation is intended to be broken by the activity of tourism.
This circuit is replete with historical temples and monuments, a majority of which are connected with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna. The great Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission had dedicated his life for bringing about a synthesis between the East and the West, which is what is going to occur with the introduction of tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit. One can also foresee a lot of superstitious ideas and beliefs crumbling and prejudices being broken through the phenomenon of tourism.

The proposed Integrated Tourism Circuit plan would be developed in such a manner that the cultural expressions of the circuit and heritage are presented in all its manifestations, including support to arts and crafts.

It has been observed that the local population is often the unwilling host for tourism development schemes as the local communities are excluded from them. All too frequently they are only employed for menial work while the major share of employment goes to the outsider. The proposed Integrated Tourism Circuit project will make it a policy priority to recruit local guides as they more often than not become delightful raconteurs of local legend and folk tales along with local history.

When it comes to the promotion of indigenously produced crafts, craftsmen through the tourism markets are able to keep their traditional skills alive. It is often argued by the purists that tourism is causing a decline in art and craft. It is important to note that the skill is not being compromised. It is the product that is adapting to contemporary market forces. The proposed tourism project will encourage local art and crafts and will ensure that the art and crafts of the region have a spontaneity and dynamism of their own. In living cultures, their survival has to be ensured by enhancing the craftsmen’s ability to be contemporary.

Another important aspect is that tradition is also something that is continuously being created, which amounts to the “Invention of Tradition”. The proposed tourism plan will ensure that the cultural assets are well preserved but at the same time the creation of
tradition is also very important. One wrong step is the commercialization of traditional culture instead of creativity, which is exactly what the proposed tourism plan has to watch out for.

Even a decade back, tourist art was not considered to be authentic art. But how does one define authenticity? Old things are authentic and new things are not? It has to be admitted that the culture created by human beings are all authentic. But most people do not think so, and tourist art is considered to be of a low class, which is meant for selling to the tourist. The bottom line is that it is important to carry on the preservation of tradition, but on the other hand, the creativity of tradition is also important, which is what the proposed tourism project will ensure.

**Environmental & Conservation Benefits:**

An Integrated Tourism Development Plan or Holistic Tourism Plan has to include in its scope of implementation detailed land-use plans designating sensitive areas and buffer zones, infrastructure development, public amenities and community facilities, long term conservation and management plan, landscape and environmental protection etc….The creation of a substantial database will provide a sound basis for the communication methodology for tourists and more importantly as a tool for education and local awareness.

Entrusting of environmental and conservation issues to the appropriate central / state departments like the Ministry of Environment & Forest, Ministry of Culture etc….will ensure that regulatory measures and mechanisms are implemented at the ground level. Upon their assessment, the type and scale of tourism development, which is compatible with the environment will be adhered to.

A state-of-the-art Management Information System (MIS) too will become a necessity when it comes to monitoring the project impact.
Conservation be it environmental or cultural, is a highly specialized job requiring technical know-how, equipment and institutional framework. The proposed Integrated Tourism Plan intends to work in close collaboration with International agencies like UNESCO, which has over the past several decades strengthened its vast network of training institutions, encouraging establishment of international, regional and sub-regional institutions, organization of training workshops, preparation of guidelines for the inventory and recording of data concerning the state of conservation of the environmental / cultural sites, exchange of conservation experts and last but not the least award of fellowships for training purposes.

Presentation of monuments and environmental sites to visitors is an essential component of all conservation programmes. The proposed tourism plan will ensure that the information pertaining to the concerned historical / environmental sites of the circuit are so interpreted that they are easily understood by the visitors. It is a fact that the monuments and natural sites have limitations and often the needs of conservation and the needs of tourists come into conflict. To avoid such pitfalls and reconciling the demands of the two and thereby creating a balance will be the topmost priority of the proposed tourism plan.
Existing Tourist Infrastructure

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission has always been in the forefront when it comes to developing quality tourist infrastructure to meet the exacting needs of the discerning travelers. In the past, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission Kamarpukur in particular has collaborated with the Ministry of Tourism for the development of basic tourist infrastructure.

The statistical details of tourist infrastructure for the year 2007-2008 along with the amount sanctioned are indicated below.

Training on Cottage Industry Products (Software):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>No of Trainees</th>
<th>Training Items Involved</th>
<th>Cost Involved (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jute Handicrafts</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Jute Bags, Desk Calendar, Doll, Owl and Pair Bird</td>
<td>3,82,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbal Medicinals Domestic</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Room Freshener, Mosquito Repellent, Soap etc...</td>
<td>3,68,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incense Sticks</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Raw Stick Scenting &amp; Packeting</td>
<td>4,26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bedsheet, Napkin, Shawl, Pillow Cover, Asana, Handkerchiefs &amp; different types of bags</td>
<td>6,54,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tourist Hardware Infrastructure Statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total Expenditure Incurred</th>
<th>Sanctioned Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Construction of Tourism Information &amp; Reception Centre, Cottage Industry Showroom and Store</td>
<td>16,72,715/-</td>
<td>16,69,260/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Cost 1</td>
<td>Cost 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Construction of roads for devotees to visit the holy places and cottage industry centers</td>
<td>7,80,080/-</td>
<td>5,56,930/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>P.C.C road around the temple and lawn</td>
<td>3,69,910/-</td>
<td>3,41,347/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Construction of wall around two ponds</td>
<td>4,91,798/-</td>
<td>4,27,010/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Construction of roadside drain</td>
<td>7,71,039/-</td>
<td>7,73,081/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Construction of parking area for vehicles</td>
<td>5,97,534/-</td>
<td>5,70,894/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Construction of main entrance gate with glow sign board</td>
<td>3,01,314/-</td>
<td>2,86,800/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Illumination of tourist spots with solar lights</td>
<td>3,70,000/-</td>
<td>3,74,678/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>53,54,390/-</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,00,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human Resource Development:**

The Kamarpukur Ramakrishna Mission Multipurpose School was established in the year 1962. In 1966, the school started classes up to XI standard. From January 1979 onwards the school has been imparting teaching to the students of class VI to class X.

In the academic session 2007-2008, the school had 603 students and 19 teachers. 12 units, comprising of 3 each in class VI and VII and 2 each in classes VIII to X are being presently conducted. The school has a well-stocked library from where students can refer text books and reference books of their choice.

Besides usual classroom teachings, the school offers students ample of opportunities by way of extra curricular activities like essay writing, recitation, elocution, music, sit and draw competitions etc… Games and sports are encouraged for making the students robust physically.

There is also an exclusive computer lab that offers regular classes to all students from standard VI to standard IX. Apart from this, the students are also offered regular music classes in vocal and instrumental under the able guidance of renowned musicians.
There is a hostel with 84 students attached to the school. The hostel boys attend P.T. classes regularly under the guidance of an expert physical instructor. Some retired teachers offer free teaching classes to senior students of the school from time to time. Eminent monks and scholars are invited to address the students to inculcate moral values and foster inspiration to them.

About 100 poor students are supplied with uniforms, sweaters, mufflers, geometry boxes, writing papers and pens etc… throughout the year. A poor boy is offered free of cost accommodation at the hostel.

**Specialized Training Programmes:**
An integral part of human resource development is the regular conduct of skill enhancing training programmes. Every year, various government departments offer specialized training modules to the rural folks to improve their skills sets.

The “Pallimangal” unit is the flagship community based organization of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission and the Kamarpukur branch has been pioneering the upliftment of the rural poor by an array of activities that ranges from incense making to craftsmanship.

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission attaches a great deal of importance to the emancipation of women and every year selected women folks of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati are imparted with quality professional training to upgrade their skill sets and stand on their own feet.

During the year 2007-2008 the following professional training programmes were conducted at the Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal, Kamarpukur –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsored by</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>No. Of Trainees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government of India, Ministry</td>
<td>Mobile phone servicing &amp;</td>
<td>Ramakrishna Mission</td>
<td>09.06.2007 to</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Medical Tourism Infrastructure:
The Ramakrishna Math & Mission Kamarpukur offers state-of-the-art medical services to the poor and needy patients of the surrounding places like Bankura, Mednipur, Bardhaman etc… A new OPD building has been constructed which commenced operations from the month of May, 2006. A wide range of treatments ranging from Allopathy, Homeopathy and Ayurveda are available for patients.

An exclusive Investigation Department has been launched that offers ECG, X-Ray, USG and Pathological reports. From time to time, special health clinics are held wherein renowned physicians, surgeons and specialist doctors from Kolkata are invited.
The following Departments are available at OPD Kamarpukur –

- Medicine.
- Surgical.
- Pediatrics.
- Obstetric & Gynecology.
- Eye.
- E.N.T.
- Orthopedics.
- Dental.
- Physiotherapy.
- Skin / Dermatology.

**National Blindness Control Programme:**

This programme has been consistently followed up for the past twenty-six years. With the launch of the modern Eye Care Centre in the year 2005-2006, screening, scanning of eye, biometry for power testing, operation, refraction, spectacle distribution, referral and investigation facilities are being offered at the Ramakrishna Math & Mission Charitable Dispensary & Eye Care Centre, Kamarpukur.

There is also a specialized medical cell for the “National Tuberculosis Control Programme” which is conducted in co-operation with CARE India and the “National Leprosy Elimination Programme” which is conducted in collaboration with the German Leprosy Relief Association.

Mobile Medical Service has been an integral part of the Mission’s medical wing. This service is provided in different villages free of cost since 1980. At present the centers where the mobile medical service is offered are the villages of Kamarpukur, Balidewanganj and Koalpara.
To further compliment the Ayurvedic therapies, an exclusive “Herbal Garden” was set up in the year 2005-2006. More than 180 rare medicinal plants collected from different regions of the country are being routinely cultivated around Haldarpukur tank.

When it comes to Ayurvedic treatments, a wide array of detoxification and relaxing therapies are on offer at the OPD Kamarpukur under the able stewardship of qualified Ayurvedic doctors with years of experience under their belt. These revolutionary and time-tested therapies have been very well received by both the public as well as tourists from outside.

From Abhayanga to Shirodahara and Nasayam to Special Ayurvedic Body and Face wrap, these Ayurvedic holiday packages have been smartly packages and offered to the tourists at a competitive price.

A few popular Ayurvedic treatments available at OPD Kamarpukur are mentioned below-

**Ela - Kizhi:** Herbal leaves and herbs or herbal powders are applied to the whole body in boluses with hot medicated oils for 2 periods of 7 to 14 days. This treatment is for osteoarthritis, arthritis with swelling, spondilosis, sports injuries etc. When herbal powders alone are used for Kizhi, it is called **Podi - Kizhi.** In Njavara-Kizhi medicated Njavara - Rice is used for kizhi.

**Medicated Steam Bath:** Certain precious herbal leaves and herbs are boiled and the steam is passed to the whole body for 10 to 20 minutes. This is good for certain skin diseases, to eliminate impurities from the body, to improve the tone of the body, to reduce fat etc.

**Nasyam:** Herbal juices, medicated oils etc are applied through the nose for 7 to 14 days. This treatment is highly effective for certain kinds of headaches, sinusitis, paralysis, mental disorders, some types of skin diseases etc
Pizhichil: In this treatment, lukewarm herbal oils are applied all over the body by two to four trained therapists in a special rhythmic way continuously for about 60 to 90 minutes per day for a period of 7 to 21 days. This treatment is very useful for rheumatic diseases like arthritis, paralysis, hemiplegia, paralysis-agitanus, sexual weakness and nervous disorders etc.

Udvarthanam: (Weight Reduction treatment): Udvarthanam is a special treatment using medicated powders. Found to be highly effective for obesity, hemiplegia and skin diseases. Also known as "powder massage", Udvarthanam is found to be very effective in treating obesity, hemiplegia, paralysis, skin diseases, impaired circulation and some Kapha predominant diseases. Two therapists apply medicated herbal powders in a special way on the body for about 30 to 40 minutes daily for a period of 14 to 28 days.

Kalari Massage: A massage programme specially envisaged for injuries to the muscles inside the body and to rejuvenate the blood vessels enabling a free flow of blood across the body. This massage programme has a rich and varied heritage. It was specially designed as a treatment programme for the Kadathanadan Kalari.

Treatments are carried out under doctor’s supervision and experienced therapists, masseurs etc.

Siro - Dhara: In this process, some herbal oils, medicated milk, medicated butter milk etc are poured on the forehead in a special method for about 45 minutes in a day for a period of 7 to 21 days. This treatment is mainly for insomnia, vatha predominated diseases, mental tension and certain skin diseases.

Sustainable Tourism Infrastructure:

Soil Testing Laboratory:

Considering the needs and priorities of the rural areas, a soil-testing laboratory was established in Kamarpukur in the year 1983. The objective was to encourage the
agricultural community to implement scientific agricultural methods of cultivation with balanced use of plant nutrients for higher production, economy, maintenance of soil health, reduction of environmental pollution etc… The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is the most intensively cultivated areas of the state of West Bengal. The laboratory caters to the needs of the farmers of four districts – Hooghly, Bankura, Burdwan and West Mednipur.

The following figures highlight the performance of the laboratory during the period 2007-2008 –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Samples Received Directly from Farmers for Testing</th>
<th>118</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soil Samples Received from Others for Testing</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Soil Tested During the Year 2007-2008</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Seed Production Programme:**

The Seed Production Programme commenced in the year 2002 to help the farming community with the supply of certified seeds with active cooperation of the Department of Agriculture, Government of West Bengal. Stress is given on Mushroom seed production, which generates good income and sustainability.

Mushroom is protein rich having high nutritional value, which can be grown at a low cost and preserved easily. In the present times it is very popular item in the food market. The cost of production is considerably low, easy to grow and does not require dedicated cultivation of land and it can even be grown in home kitchen garden.

The programme has been successful during the 2007-2008 reporting year.

**Food Processing Programme:**

Considerable quantities of fruits and vegetables such as Tomatoes, Green Mangoes, Potatoes etc… are either wasted or are not utilized fully every year during the season.
With an object of promoting cottage industries with locally available resources, minimizing wastage of perishable fruits and vegetables, showing the farmers new source of marketing and simultaneously creating new income opportunities for unemployed poor and helpless persons, the Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal, Kamarpukur started this Food Processing and Training Programme in the year 2001-2002.

The Pallimangal with active support and cooperation of the Ministry of Food Processing Industry, New Delhi and the Directorate of Food Processing & Horticulture, Government of West Bengal have been able to set up the unit and conduct regular training. Presently there are 20 different items being produced in the unit.

**Mini Jute Spinning Programme:**

The unit has been manufacturing twine from raw jute since its inception in the year 1987. The project was launched in collaboration with the erstwhile Jute Technological Research Laboratories (NIRJAFT), Department of Science & Technology, Government of India as well as the Government of West Bengal. The idea was to bring the processing unit to the jute growers by helping the jute farmers and to provide employment to the rural youths.

Production of twine of different counts during the year 2007-2008 stands at 36.38 metric tons with the average income of production (wage workers) comes to Rs.1267.00.

**Apiculture Project:**

Even though this unit hasn’t been functioning successfully, it has shown remarkable improvement since it started operations in the year 2002. There is good potentiality for Bee Keeping in the locality. Apiculture not only supports the beekeepers but also help farmers through proper pollination of crops. With the objective of helping the local people to utilize this potentiality, the programme is being implemented by the Pallimangal. Training programmes are conducted from time to time and after completion of the course the trainees are provided with bee boxes and other appliances. Quite a few numbers of unemployed youths are earning a sizeable income through this activity. Raw
honey is purchased from those beekeepers and after necessary processing and bottling are sold by Pallimangal.

**Weaving Project:**

The weaving project has been functioning satisfactorily since its inception. Handloom weaving and stitching of products are being done here by women workers.

At least 25 different types of cotton items are being produced regularly at the unit. They are – Bed Sheet, Towel, Handkerchief, Duster, Mats, Side Bag, Carpet, Dining Seat Mat, Chaddar, Muffler etc…Dhoti, Uttariya and Saress too have been produced in the Pallimangal unit located at Avirampur.

At least 33 poor and destitute women are engaged in this unit as production based wageworkers. On an average 7 of them earn more than Rs.500/- every month and one or two of them earn more than Rs.1000/- per month. Apart from this, a few persons are engaged in weaving production in the unit at the village Bhurkunda in the district of Hooghly. Poor and handicapped women are engaged in a unit at Nakunda village under this project.

**Jute Handicraft Project:**

This project has been running since inception in the year 2000-2001 and has proved to be very successful. More than 35 items like different types of bags, decorating items, mobile phone bags, money purse, table mats, pen holders, desk calendars, greeting card caps, office file etc…. are being produced and sold at the showrooms with very good response. More than 75 poor and destitute women are presently working in this unit as production based wage workers. On an average 10 of them earn more than Rs.500 per month while three of them earn more than Rs.1000/- per month. They work at Pallimangal workshop, Kamarpukur, Bhurkunda, Hazipur and individually at their homes. The women working at the workshop at Kamarpukur are provided with mid-day supplementary nutrition free of cost.
It is to be noted that 56 poor and destitute women received training during this year at Kamarpukur and Tarakeshwar arranged by NCJD.

**Incense Stick Making Project:**

This project has been in operation since its inception in the year 1980. Many poor and destitute women have been trained and are earning under the project, either working at Kamarpukur workshop or at their homes. After being trained, many women collect raw materials from the workshops and prepare incense sticks at their respective homes in their free time after completing their household works, thus supplementing their income. All together more than 35 production based workers worked in this project in the reporting year 2007-2008. Some of them have earned more than Rs.500/- per month and one or two persons have earned even more than Rs.1000/- in certain months. The products are sold under the brand name of “Sreedham Dhoop”. More than 10 different types of incense sticks are being manufactured at present. Out of those, “Pure Sandalwood”, Herbal, “Arghya” and one as mosquito repellent have become very popular with the customers. This project is supervised by a trained staff of the Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal, Kamarpukur.

**Solar Energy Programme:**

With the rapid depletion of the reserve of fossil fuel and increasing environmental pollution, the use of renewable sources of energy seems to be the only solution to save the environment and to sustain the process of development. Due to its abundance solar energy offers ample scope to be harnessed for providing household electricity, especially in unelectrified and under electrified areas.

Pallimangal is trying to promote the use of different solar photovoltaic (SPV) and solar thermal systems through awareness generation and motivation since the year 2001. A few SVP street lights are being used at different places in Kamarpukur. Pallimangal have sold 46 pieces of solar fan caps, one piece of solar lantern and one piece of radio module during the reporting year 2007-2008 through sales-cum service activities on renewable energy.
Showroom Sales Promotion:

To promote the sales of its products as well as greater exposure and interaction with different customers and artisans, a regular showroom Sales Outlet is run by Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal, Kamarpukur near Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Kamarpukur. The Pallimangal participated in the “Paschim Banga Rajya Hasta Shilpa Mela” held at Kolkata and also launched special sales counters at Cossipore and Belur Math during the “Kalpataru Utsav”. Total sales at all these places were overwhelming and beyond expectations. Twenty to thirty volunteers help in the sales at different sales counters and take part in festivals and exhibitions.
Proposed Tourist Infrastructure

The following tourist infrastructure are proposed as part of the development of the Integrated Tourism Circuit of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati –

1. Lake Resort & Tourist Village Surrounding the Haldar Pukur Waterbody at Kamarpukur:

Kamarpukur being more developed in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, a modern tourist village is proposed surrounding the Haldar Pukur water body. This sparkling water body is ideally located to the northern part of the Yogi temple. It is basically a tank or reservoir and has been freshly dug up and two exclusive bathing ghats have also been constructed. The guesthouse too has been built in close proximity to Haldar Pukur. This tank is associated with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna’s youthful days.

To fully utilize the potential of Haldar Pukur and enhance its natural beauty and splendor, an eco-friendly lake resort is the need of the hour where international tourists can spend their leisure time. With Haldar Pukur as the backdrop, the lake resort may be developed in a manner, which is like a simulated rural Bengal village with Bishnupur style thatched huts. These eco-friendly huts are not only low investment products but at the same time an authentic reflection of the circuit’s heritage.

The locally available materials like bamboo, cane, wood and thatch etc… may be used while building such hutmments for the leisure needs of the discerning international tourists. These traditional Bishnupur-style huts can heighten the tourist’s sense of authenticity as well.

A cluster of 15-20 such huts may be built surrounding the Haldar Pukur water body with options for Single occupancy, Double occupancy, Executive class and one Presidential suite.

Basic Features of the Haldar Pukur Lake Resort:
Accommodation:
- All rooms with individual AC’s, fan, IDD telephones, piped-in music, radio, private bath with shower.
- Coffee/tea making facilities.

Guest Services:
- Travel Agent.
- Laundry and Dry Cleaning Services.
- Foreign Currency Exchange.
- Medical Clinic (24 Hours).
- Souvenir Shops.

Restaurants & Banquet:
- Coffee Shop.
- Bengali Specialty Restaurant (Sit In).
- Pool Side Restaurant.
- A Lounge.
- A Drome for Internet Café and Video Games.

Recreational Facilities:
- A Swimming Pool.
- Paddle Boats.
- Indoor Games Room.
- House Boats.
- Ox Cart Carriages and Enchanting Ox Cart Rides to the Countryside.

Additional Features:
- 30 feet wide road all along the contours of the lake may be laid out.
- Coconut trees at a distance of 20 feet on both sides may be planted.
- Ornamental plants surrounding the lake may be planted.
Fish may be reared in the lake along with ducks, which will improve the microclimate as well as add revenue to the authorities. The lake will attract birds in the winter seasons which will be an added attraction for the tourists.

- Beds of flowers like Roses, Chrysanthemums, Gladioli, Jasmine, Rajanigandha and many more may be grown and cultivated in the open space of the lake.
- Bees may be reared for collecting honey, which may be served to the tourists.
- Compost pits may be dug up in locations for easy disposal of garbage and the compost may be recycled for growing fruits, flowers, vegetables through organic manure.
- Extensive use of Solar Energy for electricity generation.
- Bird Watching Observatories may be built along the banks.

2. A Craft Bazaar at Haldar Pukur Tourist Village:

Bengal has traditionally been a rich storehouse of art and crafts and has attracted the curiosity of the outside world. The entire tourist circuit of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati has a large hinterland, which has encouraged people to carry on the centuries old traditional way of earning ones livelihood, such as jewellery, carpentry, blacksmithy etc…

The concept of a traditional Craft Bazaar at the Haldar Pukur Lake Resort will be a novel idea of promoting the art and crafts of this circuit. The bazzar may be so designed that it blends harmoniously with the local environment. Small huts (Stalls) may be allotted to each local entrepreneur for a small fee.

Apart from stalls, food pavilions / plazas may be built and food may be served to visitors in environmentally safe, disposable earthen cups and leaf plates, basketry and coconut shells. An open-air theatre may also be incorporated which would serve as an ideal platform to local musicians and artists to showcase their artistic talents.

In fact the entire concept of the “Craft Bazzar” would be an upgraded version of the traditional “Haat” offering a delightful amalgam of craft, food and cultural activities.
offering a panoramic view of the richness and diversity of the handicrafts and artifacts of this particular tourist circuit.

3. A Traditional Bishnupur-style Tourist Village at Gar Mandaran:

Gar Mandaran, which is an integral part of the proposed tourism circuit is a much preferred picnic spot and holds a lot of promise as an eco-friendly tourist site. The shimmering river Damodar may be chosen as a site for extensive tourism development and a tourist village complete with Bishnupur style thatched huts and with all modern amenities, much like the above-mentioned Haldar Pukur Lake Resort may be built.

Since the Gar Mandaran site is renowned for its scenic beauty with a harmonious mix of water bodies, wetland areas, shimmering rivers and lakes etc…. Camp-style tented accommodation units too may be introduced.

Tents – An Introduction:

Today with the burgeoning growth of outdoor tourist activities tents have become an integral part of any outdoor tourism event. The primary element one has to ensure is that the vagaries of nature should not spoil the outdoor activity. Today a wide range of tents are available in the marketplace ranging from large tents that can accommodate hundreds of guests for celebrating marriages and birthdays to the smaller tents meant for an outdoor family event like picnic.

A wide variety of materials are used while manufacturing tents like cotton, nylon, polythene canvas etc…Canvas tents are the most preferred tents as it is highly weather proof and offers good resistance to the sun, wind and rain. With the ever increasing rush for adventure tourism in India, the marketplace is full of India-centric tents in which the grace and sophistication of India’s age old designs and motifs find expression, thereby making one’s outdoor holidays in India a truly Indian affair.

While buying tents, the most important factor that should be borne in mind is that the chosen tent should be weather proof, be fire resistant and produce less condensation.
These days a lot of importance is also given to UV protection. And not to forget, should come with a hardened protective cover so that the tent has longevity.

**The following categories of tents may be set up at Gar Mandaran –**

**Swiss Cottage Tents:**
Swiss cottage tents are also referred to as royal tents. In India in the days of yore, such tents were custom designed and fabricated for Indian royal entourages and during the British Raj, such tents were much in demand for the East India Company’s army. Today these tents are frequently used for catering to the exacting accommodation needs of the high-end tourists. They come in a variety of designs and the stress is on opulence and luxury rather than anything else. They are extensively used in the great Indian wilderness at places like Ranthambore, Bandhavgarh, Corbett National Park etc…and this trend is being observed even in rural India after the opening up of India’s Rural Tourism Zones. They are renowned for their elegance, sophistication and style.

**Resort Tents:**
The Resort Tents are manufactured using better-quality fabric, and they come in a wide-ranging array of shapes and sizes. The essence of these tents is on the comfort level of the guests rather than on luxury. Being lighter, these tents are easy to move around with and can be used for a variety of outdoor themes ranging from a simple picnic on the Himalayan foothills to camping in the wilderness. The Resort Tents have gained in popularity in recent times due largely to the fact that they can be easily pitched and reassembled.

**Camping Tents:**
Camping Tents are ideal for camping by the riverside, in the wilderness and even on high altitude expeditions. These tents are much preferred by the backpacker’s community who are constantly on the move in search of natural bliss. They come in the shape of cabins and on demand, geometric-shaped tents with adequate storage space too may be availed off.
Children’s Tent:
As the name itself suggests, Children’s Tents are exclusively meant for children and come in an amazing array of color combinations, designs and shapes.

Garden Tents:
Garden tents are not only high on elegance but also very graceful and spacious that makes partying in the gardens a real pleasure. They are more often than not made of eco-friendly materials like bamboo.

Proper landscaping design would be the key to further accentuate the natural beauty of the riverside as well as the lakes at Gar Mandaran where the proposed Tourist Village and the Eco-Camps are proposed. A certified Landscape Designer may be employed and the design should be such that it takes into account the soil, drainage, climate and other issues, because the survival of selected plants depends on those.

For long term maintenance of the landscape the following services need to be ensured –
- Mowing.
- Turf Fertilization.
- Weed Control.
- Disease & Insect Control.
- Pruning & Weeding.
- Soil Testing Analysis.
- Limestone.
- Aeration & Overseeding.
- Leaf Removal.
- Tree & Shrub Care.
4. **Tree House Recreation at Gadadh Sishu Udyan, Kamarpukur & Gar Mandaran:**

Tree house recreation as a concept of leisure and relaxation is increasingly becoming popular in India. Kerala and Rajasthan are two states that have been the pioneers when it comes to introducing tree houses for tourism purposes.

Keeping in mind the rural sustainable nature of tourism to be introduced in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, it can’t get more eco-friendly and natural than tree houses. This wonderful concept of recreation can be a statement of bold opposition to high rise urban monotony.

Tree houses used to kid stuff, but these days more and more adults are building houses in trees to get high and discover the joys of arboreal hideaways and they have even been the subjects of best-selling books and popular exhibitions.

There are two favorable spots which have been identified for the setting up of tree house recreation. One is the Gadadh Sishu Udyan at Kamarpukur and the other at Gar Mandaran’s Lakshmijala lake surroundings.

Both the sites have fair number of trees and the shimmering lakes will offer the perfect backdrop to the tree houses, where water sports like boating and fishing too may be encouraged for the recreational needs of the visitors. Initially 5 tree houses each may be constructed at each of the sites.

Each tree house should be large enough to accommodate a double bed, a small table and two cane chairs. At the ground level, availability of a multi-cuisine restaurant, coffee shop and an internet café would be just what the doctor ordered. An open air auditorium may also be constructed where arrangements for local tribal folk dance and folk song recitals may be held for the entertainment of the guests.
5. **Japanese Garden at Gar Mandaran:**

Keeping with the natural scenic vistas of Gar Mandaran and its suitability as an outdoor recreation center, the concept of a Japanese Garden around the areas surrounding either the Kajladighi Lake or the Lakshmijala Lake may be a very good option.

But why Japanese Garden? The great thing about the Japanese Garden is that there is an element of spirituality pervading the Japanese Gardens. A special characteristic of these gardens is the close connection between the house and garden. Living close to nature is the very essence of life in Japan. For the quintessential Japanese, his house and garden seem to be the perfect cradle, for there he feels close to God. The house and garden represent the happy marriage of art and nature.

For many centuries the gardens were laid in Europe and other parts of the world on architectectonic or geometric principles. The unmistakable influence of Buddhism is paramount in any Japanese Garden and here at Gar Mandaran in the abode of Sri Ramakrishna, the chief proponent of “Unity of World Religions”, it would perhaps be apt to design a Japanese Garden in the everlasting memory of the great Master.

The essence of Japanese garden being an oasis of peace, brilliant colors are renounced and preference is given to the various kinds of predominantly green plants so that a uniform color effect is attained. The Japanese Garden is monochrome and in monochrome gardens, flowers are of course almost entirely absent.

A few salient features of Japanese Gardens are mentioned below –

- Waterfalls & Bridges.
- Fountains.
- Stepping Stones & Pathways.
- Islands.
- Hills and Slopes.
- Hedges.
- Fences.
(6) An Exclusive Amphitheatre Zone for Son et Lumiere (Sound & Light Show) at the Matri Mandir at Joyrambati:

Every evening after dusk, a fascinating nighttime entertainment in the form of a Sound & Light Show may be conducted on the backdrop of the Joyrambati Matri Mandir as well as Holy Mother’s ancestral house located within the temple premises. This show will vividly portray the growth of the Ramakrishna Movement right from the birth of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi to the emergence of Swami Vivekananda at the world stage vis-à-vis his historic lecture at Chicago’s World Parliament of Religions in the year 1893 and the events thereafter. Vibrant lights of varying intensity with a harmoniously synchronized sound system dramatizing the Ramakrishna Movement could be deployed to draw the attention of the discerning visitors and tourists.

Due largely to technological advancements, a recent introduction in the domain of “Sound & Light” shows have been the use of headsets that allows the viewers to move through an entire historical district even as the show is in progress.

Through the use of headsets the discerning international visitors will be able to experience the “Ramakrishna Movement” right from its infancy to the global spiritual phenomenon, which it rightfully is in the present times. If scientifically conceived and implemented, the “Sound & Light Show” at Joyrambati could well be East India’s first ambulatory “Sound & Light” Show.

The story may be covered in all the major world languages like English, Hindi, German, French, Japanese and Spanish for the benefit of the discerning world traveler.

Needless to say, the selection of the architectural firm for the above mentioned “Sound & Light” Show would be of utmost importance and it is advisable that the selection of the architectural firm may be done through competitive global tender.
7. Heritage Museum & Auditorium at Joyrambati:

Heritage Museum:
When it comes to developing tourist infrastructure, there has to be an element of uniformity and continuity. It is no good to concentrate the tourist infrastructure developments only at one place. Thus, Joyrambati may be chosen as the ideal place where a state-of-art Heritage Museum and Auditorium may be set up.

While designing the museum, stress must be laid on a design that enables the museum or galleries to communicate with the discerning public and offers a creative, safe, and meaningful context in which the art objects or traditional artefacts can be studied and enjoyed. Right from the Interpretation and Script Writing to object mounting and the actual installation, the entire project has to be professionally managed by a team of experts.

Special stress must be given on the following parameters –

- Lighting.
- Interior.
- Graphics.
- Mounting.

Auditorium:
The proposed Auditorium at Joyrambati is primarily meant for hosting indigenous cultural programs as well as holding conferences and seminars on a wide range of issues ranging from India’s century’s old spiritual ethos to the latest in science and technology.

Space Attributes:
The proposed auditorium has to be custom designed to accommodate large audiences. As such, it will have wide spans and may be multiple-storied high in order to accommodate seating, sightline, and acoustical requirements. Raised stage/dais floors and special lighting equipment will also be required.
Typical features of the proposed Auditorium are listed below -

- **Sloped Floors:** Sloped floors, with level terraces for each row of seating, help provide the proper sightlines from the audience to the stage. Note that the bottom and intermediate rows should be directly accessible from entry levels for easy access for persons with disabilities.

- **Fixed Seats:** Typically, fixed seats with tilting upholstered seat and back, integral arm and tablet arm may be provided with articulated back for maximum occupant passage space between rows. The seats may be fully upholstered or wood contoured outer back and seat shells with wood armrests with tablet arm option and aisle light option at row ends. Seat number/row letters should be disability compliant. Wheelchair access option-removable seats in sections of two and accessible end chairs for mobility limited occupants may also be provided.

- **Special Lighting:** Dramatic lighting systems include front lighting, foot lighting, spot lights, follow spot lights, beam lights, and flood lights, and a projection room/booth with manual and programmable lighting controls, and space for the spot light operator space. Lighting systems should be flexible to accommodate various performance venues (e.g., lectures, plays, musical performances, etc.) in the Auditorium.

- **Special Acoustical Design:** Quality acoustical characteristics are important in Auditorium spaces so that performances and presentations can be clearly heard and understood. For performance spaces and general presentation spaces, recommended noise criteria (NC) rating ranges from NC-20 to NC-30; recommended sound transmission class (STC) rating ranges from STC 40 to STC 50.

**Sustainability of the Premises:**

- **Increased Cooling Capacity:** Heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems for Auditorium spaces may be sized and zoned to accommodate varying internal loads, which are a function of audience sizes, performance lighting loads, and projection equipment. Particularly, air-handling units (AHUs) with increased cooling capacity should be zoned separately for the auditorium, lobby, projection spaces,
stage areas, and audience seating areas. Also, the Auditorium typically may have a separate AHU constant volume with modulated temperature control for ventilation.

- **Raised Floor:** The recommended system for distribution of HVAC in auditorium spaces is ducted supply through floor vents with ducted ceiling return air vents in auditorium and lobby. In other spaces, ducted ceiling supply with return air ceiling plenum is recommended. Note that there should be transfer ducts at all acoustically rated partitions.

**Safety Issues:**

- **Fire and Life Safety:** Proper notification systems, lighting, and signage are required to facilitate safe and speedy evacuations during an emergency in the Auditorium spaces. Step lights recessed into floor risers at each seating tier and wall mounted low light level sconce lights along side walls are typical. Sprinklers should be provided per code and under stage platforms to suppress fires.

8. **Ox Cart Carriages:**

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is surrounded by fascinating rural countryside and the verdant lush green hinterlands offer unending agricultural vistas. Touring to explore some of the most fascinating villages of West Bengal for a short break, staying on ethnic farms and experiencing rural Bengal at its best are undoubtedly very appealing, more so when the journey is on the slow moving century’s old Ox cart carriages.

The Ox Cart carriages may be so designed that they serve as one’s home on wheels for a couple or family with children. Oxes, feed, bed linen, cooking utensils, tents and everything that one possibly needs for such a unique journey of the countryside, complete with maps and directions may be provided to the discerning tourists.

Tourists may be given full freedom to choose the route they like. Covering a distance of 8 Kms. per day would be ideal.
It is to be noted that farm holidays on a bed and breakfast basis costs far less than hotel stays and it is a completely different experience. Simple hosts, unusual cottages, the sight of cows being milked, of farmers ploughing their paddy fields through ox and buffaloes, the rustic joy of smoking the hookah pipe and many more simple village delights can be attractively packaged and sold to the tourists.

To begin with, a set of 6 (six) specially designed Ox carts with comfortable seating arrangements, adequate legroom and storing provisions may be launched. A permanent shed may be built either at the Haldar Pukur Lake Resort at Kamarpukur or at the tourist village at Gar Mandaran, to ensure the safekeeping of the Oxes and the carriages.

9. Bus Terminal at Kamarpukur:

In the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, Kamarpukur is the principal hub of pilgrim tourists, this being the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Over the years there has been a steady growth in tourist traffic both domestic and international, which has resulted in manifold increase in the number of buses that ply to and fro Kolkata, the nearest metropolitan city located at a distance of 104 Kms. Buses also ply at regular intervals from other major towns of West Bengal like Durgapur, Burdwan and Tarakeshwar.

For the planned development of this tourist circuit, a modern Bus Terminal within the periphery of Kamarpukur town is proposed. An efficient public transport system is considered to be vital and will cater to both the local commuting needs as well as weekend, domestic and international tourist movements.

The proposed Bus Terminal may be implemented on Public Private Partnership (PPP) set-up through Build, Lease and Maintain (BLM) model.

The private sector primarily would be entrusted to undertake the design, finance, construction and maintenance of the Bus Terminal.
The Private Sector operator will be able to recover its investment through the following means –

- Advertising revenue generated from the Bus Terminus.
- Lease rentals from the commercial complexes.
- Parking fees from two and four wheelers.
- Lease rentals from shops and kiosks.
- Passenger amenity fees.

The Department of Transport, Government of West Bengal would be the nodal authority for the proposed Bus Terminal at Kamarpukur.

**Land Requirement:** 5 Acres, which may be identified by the Department of Transport, Government of West Bengal.

Upon completion of the proposed Bus Terminal at Kamarpukur, it will serve as the main boarding and alighting point in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit. A depot may also be integrated in the construction plan, which may be used as a night halt stop, repairs/maintenance workshops and for parking of buses.

A complete list of passenger amenities / facilities at the proposed Bus Terminal at Kamarpukur is mentioned below –

- Boarding and alighting bays.
- Platforms.
- Parking area for two and four wheelers.
- Bituminous Road
- Reservation Counter.
- Police Post.
- Retiring Rooms.
- STD/ISD Telephone booths
• Cyber Café.
• Shops.
• Tourist Information Counter.
• Toilets.
• Seating shelter for passengers.
• Provision of Sanitized Drinking Water.
• Display of Schedule.
• Cloak Room.
• Facilities for the disabled.

10. Water Treatment Plant:

A state-of-the-art Water Treatment Plant that applies physical and chemical processes for making water suitable for human consumption and other purposes may be set up at Kamarpukur. Drinking water must be bacteriologically safe, free from toxic or harmful chemicals or substances, and comparatively free of turbidity, color and taste-producing substances in order to be acceptable to the discerning international tourists.

Through competitive bidding, the most professional firm may be chosen to undertake the setting up of a Customized Water Treatment Plant as per Water Analysis Report at source.

Whatever be the water treatment system, the authorities must first ensure that water is tested to determine which contaminants are present. Knowledge of the contaminants present in the water should guide the testing, since it is not economically feasible to test for all possible contaminants. It is imperative to know what contaminants are present, their quantities, and reasons for removal (i.e., to reduce contaminants posing health risks, to remove tastes or odors, etc.) prior to selecting treatment methods or equipment.

Excessive hardness and high concentration of dissolved solids are not desirable. The treatment processes of greatest importance are sedimentation, coagulation, filtration, disinfection, softening and aeration.
The Case for Reverse Osmosis Plant:

The turnkey projects for sewage treatment plant with Reverse Osmosis system is widely used for water treatment. Domestic waste water generated from toilet, bath room, and canteen is biologically treated and the treated waste water is passed through the ozonator for disinfection and the same is reused for cooling tower, toilet, floor washing and gardening.

Reverse osmosis (RO) systems frequently are used to reduce the levels of total dissolved solids and suspended particles within water. These systems remove a variety of ions and metals as well as certain organic, inorganic and bacterial contaminants. The RO membrane alone may not be an effective method for total removal of these contaminants, but a properly designed system may be effective in reducing these contaminants to safe levels.

These osmosis plants assist in removing various bacteria, lead particles, cysts and organic chemicals from the contaminated water and correspondingly, reduce the risk of anemia, cancer, kidney damage and high blood pressure.

11. Solid Waste Management:

It is recommended that turntable solid waste disposal bins be placed at different points along the tourist circuit. Solid waste compression equipment unit is proposed to be placed at Kamarpukur. Waste collection is proposed to be managed more scientifically with arrangements for stacking the compressed bags in Iron cage pits that can easily contain some 50 or more bags/sacks. These cages should be airy, should not spill, and neither should weather out in a season. Plastic cages are not recommended due to the reason of these getting brittle in sun and may get damaged early, these would not be as airy. Compressed plastic waste is proposed to be transported down and used for incineration/recycling. Contracts for purchase of this waste could be given so that government cost of collection and transportation can be reduced.
Waste Management is one of the most critical areas in the total Tourist Environmental Management Plan. The tourist circuit will function based on “Visitor carries Waste” principle as adopted in many international Eco-Tourism destinations. An Eco-Deposit of Rs. 50/- or as decided by the Department of Tourism may be collected from the visitors who have to declare the plastic items – polythene, bags, beverage bottles, etc. carried by them, at the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit.

This deposit will be given back to them once they return back and show that they are carrying back the waste. This waste can then be deposited in the nearest large iron cage waste collection of the tourist circuit. These cages should be airy, should not spill, and neither should weather out in a season.

Waste Bins (turntable) are to be placed every 100 m in the path. One solid waste compression equipment unit is to be placed at Kamarpukur. Waste collection area needs to be managed more scientifically with arrangements for stacking the compressed bags in Iron Cage pits that can easily contain some 50 or more bags/sacks and in no case these should be stacked near rivers or streams.

**Novel Tourism Products**

**Yoga Vacations:**
A Yoga vacation is a vacation with a difference. Guests and visitors participate fully in the routine, experiencing both its joys and challenges. The day begins and ends with “Satsang”. “Satsang” actually consists of silent meditation followed by chanting and an inspired talk or reading from the scriptures, providing an opportunity to calm the mind and seek clarity on particular points.

During their stay at the rejuvenation center the visitors become familiar with daily prayers and Sanskrit slokas (verses), which are chanted during “Satsang”, before meals, before and after Yoga classes and even before a walk or a car trip. Yoga classes are
structured to provide a set of comprehensive exercises involving Pranayama, Yoga Asanas and relaxation.

Meals consist of Yogic vegetarian diet consisting of pure, simple and natural foods that promote health have the least negative impact on the environment and causes least pain to other beings. Some of the vegetables and herbs can also be grown in ones own backyard kitchen garden.

The following activities may be performed during a Yoga Vacation –

(i) Silent Walks.
(ii) Bush Walking.
(iii) Star Gazing at Night.
(iv) Ayurvedic Cooking Workshops.
(v) New Years Eve Vigil.
(vi) Candle Lit Vigil for World Peace.
(vii) Classical Music & Dance.
(viii) Horse Riding.

**Bicycle Rides:**
These days people are looking for authentic experiences that may be cultural as well as natural. The natives of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit have never been exposed to activity oriented international visitors in the true sense. Most foreign visitors who come to visit these two holy places (Kamarpukur and Joyrambati) keep themselves within the precincts of the temples and its surroundings. Very few tend to explore the hinterlands, which is where the best of rural Bengal countryside can be experienced.

There is no better way of exploring the Bengal countryside other than embarking on a refreshing bicycle tour to the hinterlands of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit.
The sweet smell of flowers and fruits will compel tourists to stop on their way and marvel at the grandeur of nature. In West Bengal as it is anywhere else in India, the culture, beliefs, superstitions, rituals and religion changes from place to place. Thus, each village will have something unique to offer and to experience this diversity one needs to socialize and mingle with the local people who are the best ambassadors of their native village.

A carefully planned Cycling Trail needs to be developed so that the discerning international visitors are offered the most rewarding cultural experience.

**Farm Holidays & Agriculture Tours:**
Farm holidays are back and are up for grabs. As rapid urbanization grips the world and the resultant stress and strain from the din and bustle of the cities affecting more and more people worldwide, the concept of holidaying in a farm is becoming popular with each passing day.

The people of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit depend to a large extent on agriculture. There is no dearth of verdant agriculture lands in this particular tourist circuit.

Trips to some of the most fascinating villages of West Bengal for rejuvenating one’s body and soul, staying on ethnic farmhouses and experiencing the very best of rural Bengal is indeed an experience of a lifetime.

Farm Holidays on a Bed & Breakfast basis costs less than hotel stays and it’s a completely different experience. Simple hosts, unusual cottages with local Bengali art and design patterns on the walls, impressive cultural entertainment at dusk, the sight of cows being milked, of farmers tilling their fields with cows and water buffaloes, of the rustic joys of smoking the Hookah pipe and many more simple village delights can be attractively packaged and sold to the prospective tourists.
Above all, a Farm Holiday will be warm, cozy and homely often with open fires of logs or coal to cheer a cool winter evening. Transportations used may be specially designed Ox cart carriages that will recreate an authentic village life that existed centuries back.

“Catch a Fish” Tours:
A Bengali and his fish are hardly ever parted. And the pieces of fish are laid out on the stalls just as they would be at home – immersed in curry or fried; as cutlets or even as fish fingers.

The most popular fishes in the state of West Bengal are the Rohu, Katla, Chingri (Prawn) and the one and only Hilsa.

Visitors to the hinterland surrounding the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit are often mesmerized by the activities of the fishermen, who set out mostly in the late afternoon and arrive with their catch the next morning.

Little do the tourists realize that these fishermen live a life fraught with danger and uncertainty. The fishermen have to counter the vagaries of nature, the dwindling catch and the intense competition from fishing trawlers.

Sailing on a fisherman’s boat can be a very rewarding experience. It is like taking a trip down the memory lane. The fishermen of hinterland surrounding the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit lead a simple, uncluttered and slow lifestyle. The lilting “Bhatiyali” songs that they sing while rowing are not only sentimental reflections of the gentle movements across the water but they also convey a deeper philosophy.

The hinterland surrounding the villages of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit are replete with numerous water bodies in the form of tanks, reservoirs and ponds. Due attention must be given for the safekeeping of these water bodies so that the wetland areas are protected, especially Gar Mandaran, which is rich in terms of wetland areas. Efforts have to be made to develop an Eco-Friendly sustainable fish culture.
**Bengali Weeding Tours:**

A Bengali marriage is always very special involving high drama, great pomp and grandeur, great festivity, high degree of emotions and food that is lip-smacking good. The Bengali weeding has all the ingredients of a “Soap Opera”.

During the wedding season, lot of marriages takes place in the villages of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit and given the fascination of the affluent Western tourists who come to India with the primary goal of experiencing India’s rich cultural diversity, it would only be in the fitness of things that they visit India and precisely the state of West Bengal during the peak wedding season.

Good interpreters and well informed tourist guides with in-depth knowledge about the pros and cons of Bengali culture and heritage may be assigned to guide the discerning international tourists and explain the nuances of a Bengali wedding ceremony.
Community Participation

This section attempts to undertake a systematic study on socio-economic impact of tourism development in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, the approach to make the local community partners in the sustainable eco-tourism development and to develop human resources for the envisaged employment opportunities.

During the period of the Master Plan preparation, extensive interactions were held with the local community and other stakeholder representatives, Mahila Samity representatives, trade community etc. at various levels including individual discussions and brain storming sessions to understand their perception towards development and community participation. The rural residents of the circuit in general are more than willing to actively participate in the tourism development. The approach to development should therefore be such that it reaches the grassroots level. Most of the work involved in tourism development is labour intensive and hence local villagers should be involved in these activities. Most of the activities are proposed to be run by the local community themselves. This will provide local job opportunity at one hand and on the other hand will win local goodwill and support. Also, eco-tourism is about being managed by the local community and to make it sustainable in the long term. This approach can be applied across the following areas of attention:

Community-based Tourism:
An effective way to improve the economy in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit and to enable communities to improve the quality of life will be through social mobilization of people, especially into Self Help Groups (SHGs). This will involve community participation in tourism activities such that the benefits of development are equitably distributed. This will include improved access to education/training and other social services of the community. There are already initiatives like the “Pallimangal” *(a Ramakrishna Math & Mission run philanthropy works organization)*, which has carved a
niche for itself as far as women’s empowerment in the circuit is concerned, the same way there could be more women’s initiatives.

• **Focus on self-help** - Activities should be aimed to help people to better understand the opportunities that tourism will create and they have to improve their own situation. Trainings should be given to Mahila Samitis and local NGOs, village Panchayats, Gram Sabha, Yuva Samities, etc. to form Self Help Groups in the area to set up sustainable activities.

• **Government Role as a Facilitator** – The State Government should try to avoid implementing activities themselves, but rather build the capacity of existing local/regional organisations to be able to plan and implement tourism activities on their own in a sustainable manner. Role of Government bodies is particularly important in imparting development and management regulations.

Groups have been formed in many villages of West Bengal wherein women’s groups have been mobilized to form small groups for savings & credit for improving the economic conditions of the individual women. Micro-credit has been given to them for starting small enterprises for generating additional income and thus improving their overall economic condition. The same model can be adopted in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit as well.

**Benefits to Local Communities**-

Development of tourism in rural West Bengal provides an excellent opportunity for achieving a diversification in addition to providing a wide range of benefits, both direct and indirect, to the local host community of the region. This is true for any region where tourism development has taken place anywhere in the world. Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of any region and benefits of planned tourism development are manifold. Moreover, the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit being surrounded with a large hinterland which is rich in agriculture, art and crafts, a well-planned and regulated tourism for this region is the need of the hour. For this the involvement of local community is very critical.
Already tourism, particularly pilgrim tourism has emerged as an important economic activity in Kamarpukur and Joyrambati region and the local populace has been able to participate and benefit directly from limited tourism activities, but not at all in a planned way and with less consideration to environmental management and standards for aesthetics and quality hospitality.

The following section explores the possibility of tourism benefits reaching the local community in a planned manner so as to improve the overall socio-economic condition prevalent in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit.

The broad objectives of such a development plan are enumerated below:
• Socio-economic development and economic empowerment.
• Enhance local participation in tourism activities.
• Providing more avenues for tourists to increase their expenditure in a way that the economic benefits reach the community.
• Economic and ecological sustainability.
• Socio-cultural consciousness and
• Improving gender equality for enhanced women participation in economic development.

The focus therefore is to:
• Establish and promote a different way of conducting tourism, wherein local people are the owners and have control over entrepreneurial activity, improving their quality of life and actively conserving the region's biodiversity and natural resources and be accountable for the same.
• Create and strengthen community entrepreneurial activities such that they are well administered, conform to standards of architectural aesthetics and hospitality, and are economically profitable.
• Establish a forum for communication, co-ordination and joint co-operation focusing on tourism quality and reliability, and environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
Current Situation

In earlier times people of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit relied heavily on agriculture, livestock and surrounding resources for almost all their needs and were largely self-sufficient. Today agricultural farming and livestock farming are hardly undertaken by many due to the poor distribution system and poor marketing and storage facilities. It has also been observed that agriculture alone can no longer sustain households for the whole year; people also need to bring in some form of cash income, either through casual labour, marketing, running/renting - hotel/lodge/restaurant businesses or migration to nearby work centres (like Arambag, Kolkata and other cities of India etc.).

It was observed that there is much concern with the lack of local employment opportunities resulting in migration, which is sometimes seasonal also. The causes can be attributed to the pressure of getting employed as early as possible leading to discontinued education beyond secondary school levels. There is a strong agreement that the development of proper tourism infrastructure, cottage industries like incense stick manufacture, making souvenir of dry flowers, indigenous handicrafts small baskets/ vase / lampshades/ hats/ stationery holders/ carry bags or hand bags etc… and the marketing as well as management of local tourism products (lodges, restaurants, nature interpretation services, eco-guides, eco-maintenance of trek paths/facilities, etc.) have the most potential to generate local jobs and income.

As mentioned earlier, though the level of nature/eco-awareness amongst the local community is good, the pressures of earning as early as possible has led to the low level of formal education in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit. The recommendations for the training and education have been separately dealt with in the following sections. Some of the potential direct and indirect benefits related to socio-economic and infrastructure development that might accrue to the people consequent to development of tourism in this region are delineated below.
Direct Benefits
Some of the direct benefits accruing to the local community of the region as a result of tourism development are as follows:

Employment Opportunities in Tourism Sector:
Tourism industry has high potential of employment generation. It generates employment, both directly in the tourism sector and indirectly in various support and resource management sectors. It offers employment to skilled, semiskilled and unskilled workers, especially the local community. Opportunities are generated in hotels, restaurants, tea/snack shops, handicrafts (souvenir), cultural troupes, guides/nature interpreters, photographers, etc. to name a few.

People are undoubtedly the most important resource in tourism industry as it provides highly personalized service to customers. Development of tourism along with human resource development and training of the local people will lead to income creation among the local populace. It has been estimated that the tourism and hospitality sector, along with the catering sector, accounts for more than 50 percent of the total employment generated.

The proposed development will also stimulate the establishment of local tourism enterprises. These provide opportunities for local capital investment, jobs, income, profits made from the enterprises and generally developing a sense of entrepreneurship that may not have existed previously in the area. The availability of jobs and better living conditions due to tourism will also reduce the migration of young people from the region to seek employment elsewhere. In addition to the host community, in the project area, people from nearby regions are also seasonally dependent in low profile works like Ox cart drivers, porters, sweepers, etc.

Development of Enterprise:
Tourist expenditure at a particular tourist area greatly helps the development of the surrounding areas. It can provide jobs for a large number of unskilled/semiskilled
workers. It can generate work for the construction industry and a wide range of other supporting industries e.g. Entrepreneurs for running various cluster facilities enroute can hire local people for assembling the proposed temporary structures/accessories before the start of tourist season as well dis-assembling the same once the tourist season is over, and transporting and depositing the same at the Stores located at the nearest village settlements identified.

Most of the development at local levels would have to be driven by the enterprise which would invest in hotels/lodges, restaurants, eateries, recreational centres, information and communication centres, handicrafts/souvenir shops, etc. These small enterprises shall be primarily put up by the local people themselves. Some of the activities that emerged as a possible source of income generation in the region are as given below.

- **Setting up village based shops:** There exists enough scope of income generation by setting up of village based tourist centres, wood craft / handicraft shops, technically upgraded agriculture implement making, household electrical and mechanical goods, craft products, souvenir shops, publishing & printing, etc. The wares could be continued to be produced in off season and can be sold during the tourist season.

- **Animal Husbandry:** Milch cattle and milk are of high demand, especially in the tourist season. The local people can be provided micro-credit in order to keep high quality milch cattle with the assistance from Department of Animal Husbandry (with respect to good breeding methods for high yield quality milch cattle). Apart from the collection of grass and other bio-mass, local people should be trained/encouraged for agro-forestry which suits to the local settings and which do not hamper the basic crop yield in this tourist circuit. This activity will also result in availability of another avenue of fodder and fuel to individuals mostly from their own fields to save them from the drudgery of fodder and fuel wood collection and thereby to reduce pressure on the nearby reserve forest areas.
• **Poultry and Beekeeping:** Poultry is a traditional practice. However, this is still at the very marginal level and caters to only home needs. This can be another source of economic development. There exists a lot of potential for bee keeping since not only flowers but the crops that the locals grow also bear good flowers. Bee keeping can be popularized by providing technical know how and basic bee colonies and bee boxes.

**Improved Standard of Living:**
Improvement in the general standard of living of the people in any region is directly dependent on the nature and volume of employment opportunities in the region. Tourism industry being an important sector of the overall service industry thus contributes to the upliftment of the living standards of the population thereby driving the economic development of any region. Increased tourist inflow into the region means more tourist expenditure in the local economy, which in turn leads to an improved standard of living of the local host community. The involvement in maintaining their own community, environment and developing skills will lead to self efforts to improve quality of life and improve their self-esteem.

**Better Education and Training:**
The growth in employment opportunities in the tourism sector would also lead to general upliftment of the levels of education in the region. People seeking employment in various arenas of the tourism and hospitality industry would propel them to upgrade their own skills and education levels for gainful employment in the sector. This would undoubtedly lead to improvement in the levels of education and training being imparted at present. Involvement of local people in the tourism development will lead to an empowered skilled community.

**Social Upliftment and Improved Quality of Life:**
With more tourists flowing into the circuit and with improved levels of education, the socio-cultural exchanges between the tourists and the host community is bound to lead to social upliftment of the circuit. Such a sociocultural exchange of ideas does have its flip
side too, but the host community can derive maximum benefits out of this phenomenon by going with the concept of responsible tourism development.

Tourism will also encourage a greater environmental awareness and sense of cultural identity by residents when they see tourists enjoying the environmental, historical and cultural heritage. The local host community would be the sole decider of what and how much it would allow to develop and what would be the face of “responsible tourism experience” in the region. Thus, the local population itself shall decide the kind and extent of social upliftment in the region. Tourism development shall be the desired catalyst for this phenomenon.

**Sustainable Environmental Practices:**
The environment is the basis for the natural and cultural resources for attracting tourists in the region. Environmental protection of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is therefore perceived as an essential component for long-term success of tourism in this region. The tourism development activities will also include increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets both among the locals and tourists. It is expected that through the cooperation and productive interaction of the tourism industry, environmental protectors and the local community, it will ensure a regulated tourism that will benefit all and achieve environmental sustainability in the region.

The overall environmental quality of the area will improve as a result of sustainable tourism and preference of tourists to visit attractive, clean and nonpolluted natural places. As tourism acts as a catalyst for redevelopment of places, better land development and landscaping will also be effected. This will have a direct bearing on the health and nutrition of the local populace, especially children who are most susceptible to pollution.

**Employment in Infrastructure Sector:**
Construction industry is another very big source of employment. The basic infrastructure—any roads, up gradation of trek path, helipads, water supply and other public utilities, as
also construction of hotels and other accommodation units create jobs for hundreds of workers, both unskilled and skilled. The entire important sector of basic infrastructures represents appreciable source of employment opportunities for the local population. Operation and maintenance of infrastructure developed in the region for promoting tourism also provides an important source of employment to large number of local people over a range of skills. A large number of people are expected to be employed in the operation and maintenance of the infrastructure development of the region.

**Economic Upliftment Due To Income Multiplier Effect:**

The receipts from tourism can provide a valuable source of earnings for the region. Although tourism is sensitive to the level of economic activity in the tourist generating countries; it provides more stable earnings than primary products. The income from tourism has tended to increase at a higher rate than merchandise export in a number of countries.

The flow of money generated by tourist spending multiplies as it passes through various sections of the economy. A direct expenditure of an amount of money by a tourist leads to further expenses in the economy across various layers. This ripple effect generates income not just for the primary receiver of the money from the tourist but also for the entire chain that supplies various goods and services that go into fulfilling the needs and requirements of the tourist.

This phenomenon is the income multiplier effect and growth of tourism in the circuit would mean a higher income multiplier and hence an improved economy of the region. In addition to being an important source of income, tourism provides a number of other economic benefits, which vary in importance from one region to another and also depending upon the nature and scale of tourism.

The benefits from infrastructure investments, justified primarily for roads/pucca trek paths, helipads, water supply and other public utilities, may be widely shared by the other sectors of the economy. Government officials, students & research scholars, and local
residents would, also use tourist facilities in this region such as hotels, restaurants, and public transport.

Tourists also contribute to tax revenue both directly through sales taxes and indirectly through property, toll, eco-development fee, profits and income taxes. Tax multipliers for tourism expenditure is also observed to be very high. These can be ploughed back for the maintenance and up-gradation of trek path and public utilities. Tourism provides employment, brings infrastructure improvements and may help in regional development.
Merging Rural Tourism with Spiritual Tourism

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission has a proven track record as far as working for the emancipation of the rural folks are concerned. The Ramakrishna Movement, which is based on the tenets of – “Unity of All Religions” has become a source of peace and blessedness in not only India but elsewhere in the world as well. The fact that the “Movement” lays considerable emphasis on “Selfless Service” as a means towards salvation attracts many people, irrespective of their nationality, to be associated with this remarkable movement.

In terms of spiritual ambience, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission offers the very best of India’s 5000 year old spiritual heritage by way of religious discourses, meditation and selfless service to the poor etc….

All over the world, more and more people are falling prey to stress related disorders resulting from the fast paced urban lifestyle. People from the affluent Western countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany and France have been visiting India in search of mental peace and solitude. The stressed out Western tourists come to India with the hope of finding solace from the sheer ruthlessness of the material world.

In India, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been offering the nectar of spiritual peace and solitude to the citizens of the world right from its inception. Although Indian devotees outnumber foreign devotees, awareness about the Ramakrishna Math & Mission is fast spreading in abroad as well. At present the Ramakrishna Math & Mission have centers in countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Switzerland, Brazil, Argentina, Fiji Island, Russia, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati have been respected as spiritual tourism destinations by both the domestic as well as international visitors for many decades now.
Thus far the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been meeting the needs of visitors to Kamarpukur and Joyrambati villages all by itself with hardly any help from any quarters. Needless to say, the tourist infrastructure at both these villages are at best sketchy and only the bare minimum of tourist amenities are available.

Given the fact that the “Ramakrishna Movement” is now a global spiritual phenomenon with more and more devotees being added to the already staggering numbers, there is an urgent, if not immediate need to develop the basic tourist infrastructure like roads, hotels & motels, quality way side amenities, departmental stores, computers and high speed Internet connectivity etc… to cater to the exacting needs of the discerning visitors from India and abroad.

In order to meet the existing needs of the tourists and to further add to the list of visitors intending to visit the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati along with the scenic vistas of Gar Mandaran, Rural Tourism may be introduced which has of late become a policy priority with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. By introducing Rural Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, not only will the visitors be able to experience the spiritual dimension of this intriguing tourist circuit, but it would also go a long way in improving the quality of life of the rural folks. In terms of experience, the visitors too will be able to take back home not just snapshots but memories that will linger on for a lifetime.

Rural Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit will go hand in hand with Spiritual Tourism or Pilgrim Tourism for which this tourist circuit is so well known throughout the world. In fact, they will compliment each other. The basic idea is to re-engineer the existing tourism product (Spiritual Tourism) for the purpose of retaining, enhancing and capturing newer markets. The entire rural populace including the womenfolk will be empowered to take decisions at the grass roots level. The circuit infrastructure has to be drastically improved so as to attract the attention of the global traveler.
Both the Central Government as well as the State Government has taken a number of steps for the promotion of Rural Tourism and achieving the goal of sustainable tourism development. Now, it needs to be practically applied in one of India’s most outstanding Pilgrim Tourism Circuit, which incidentally happens to be associated with the life and times of one of India’s most revered spiritual giant – Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.
A Meaningful Life In the Abode of Sri Ramakrishna

If there is one thing we fear – and fear it most desperately than death itself, it is the dread of living a life without significance. This dreadfulness has become more prominent as we advance technologically in our struggle to master the external world. We chase impossible goals that turn to ashes in our own hands. Our interior world remains unexplored, uncultivated and barren. Even though we have enjoyed remarkable technological progress, the psychic cost has been great. It is like we have dangled ourselves over the edge of a rocky promontory.

The world that we have made for ourselves is a very complex one indeed. Particularly in the Western world, where life is vastly easier and most people live longer, eat more and work less. Many live in private homes and drive to work alone in their own cars. Office workers communicate instantaneously across continents through telephone, fax and E-mail. Industries crank out new goods faster than people can buy them in ever-bigger shopping malls. All these advantages comes for a price: new kinds of health problems, many caused by dirty air and water left behind by industries, the loss of parkland as highways devour open spaces and sprawling desolate suburbs where neighbors are strangers and fear of crime isolates people behind locked doors.

Psychologists and Psychiatrists lay more and more emphasis on the mental health of the people living in highly automated urban surroundings and rightfully advise leisure and recreation activities which need not necessarily mean physical rest but also genuine mental regeneration. But in what form? The answer is Rural Tourism that is sustainable in nature.

Rural Tourism has much deeper meaning in that its goal is to improve the quality of human life, enhance human potential by providing goods and services that enable humans to meet the potential, support local environment and culture and use environmentally sensitive products and methods.
For more than a century the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been laying emphasis on living a life, which is perfectly in accordance with the Vedas. The Vedic way of life is as Eco-Friendly as one can possibly imagine. The tranquility that surrounds the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit will come as a total surprise to the discerning international visitors. The slow moving Ox carts still ply on the village roads, the thatched hutments are still in existence, joyful Jatras (village theatres) are still performed by rural artists, cows and buffaloes are still being used in tilling the soil and the popular folklore is still alive even to this day in spite of the onslaught of modernity.

The burgeoning surge in the number of visitors, both domestic as well as international who visit the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is due primarily to the essence of Sri Ramakrishna’s ideology – “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth”. How inspiring indeed!

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission endeavors to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. And it all started from two miniscule villages (Kamarpukur and Joyrambati) located in one of the remotest corners of the state of West Bengal.

Both the villages are replete with sparkling water bodies, ruins of old buildings and temples that bears ample testimony to their rich virile past. The lush green hinterlands surrounding the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit offers breathtaking scenic vistas of the romantic Bengal countryside. There is also the quintessential rural Bengal sweet shops that still churn out mouth watering traditional Bengali sweets like Jelabi, Nolen Gur shahi Sandesh, Rajbogh, Lady Keannie, Kalo Jam, Payesh etc… that is sure to make the most discerning foodie succumb to his or her tastebuds.
During the festival season, the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, particularly Kamarpukur and Joyrambati takes on a whole new look. The two main festivals – Durga Puja and Kali Puja are celebrated with great pomp and grandeur. Equally impressive are the celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi that attracts visitors from all over the world and its carnival time out here.

Fairs and festivals in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit are very much a celebration of life. The essence here is on “spontaneity” which makes the process of assimilation of an alien culture a truly wonderful proposition.

The security that mankind knew once is now long gone. The faith that knit our lives together slowly unraveled with the intrusion of science. The paradigm shift in the West’s worldwide view over the past century has rendered God, if not dead, at least coolly marginalized. It is the “spiritual outlook” that gives meaning to life. It is the spiritual approach to life that recognizes that our lives have meaning and that there is a purpose and a goal.

It is this element of security that is on offer in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit. Add to it the characteristic features of Rural Tourism and you have all the makings of an “Eden on Earth”.
Tourist Circuit Strengths and Weaknesses

The people of Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur are warm, open, friendly people with a long tradition of generous hospitality and a wealth of folklore. Though fundamentally important, a viable tourism industry requires more than a range of natural and cultural attractions and a welcoming people. A sound infrastructure along with a developed superstructure of facilities and amenities are also needed. In fact tourism is a highly diverse industry that requires many different components to be in place before there is a complete product to offer in the marketplace. The implication of this is that a deficiency in any one component will undermine the capacity of the destination to meet the expectations of tourists.

With this in mind, competitive strengths and weaknesses of Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourism circuit have been reviewed from the standpoint of the market. A special survey based on the Interview method was carried out among the top 50 tour operators in the metropolitan city of Kolkata to determine the motivations, attitudes, opinions of their clients. The responses are shown on the following table.

Competitive Strengths of the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur Tourist Circuit:

The strengths of the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourist circuit are dominated by historical and pilgrim assets of West Bengal and mirror the clients motivations for visiting the region. The main strengths are:

- Culture and pilgrim landmarks.
- unspoiled environment and beautiful West Bengal countryside.
- low tourist density
- safe destination
- authenticity and the ‘unique Bengal experience’
- friendly people
As seen by the Kolkata based tour operators, the above strengths of the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourist circuit sets itself apart from its competitors. Although it was noted that during the festival season this circuit becomes more crowded, the general feeling was that on the whole this tourist circuit was still very preferable and superior.

This rural part of West Bengal has an unspoilt environment and beautiful scenery. Its authenticity in offering the ‘Unique Rural West Bengal Experience’ is a major strength and motivation.

It is felt that Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourist circuit can command a premium price – if the deficiencies in relation to the infrastructure, facilities and service standards are improved.

**Constraints to Development – Product Weaknesses:**

The response of Kolkata based tour operators is that the weaknesses of the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourism circuit centre around:

- poor infrastructure – especially roads.
- lack of quality accommodation.
- Unreliability of internal transport
- poor service standards
- poor quality guides
- low quality tour operators
- Problem of overcrowding during the festival season.

As part of the field survey for this up-date for the Tourism Masterplan, the Kolkata based tour operators were also asked for their opinions as to the weaknesses of the tourism product.

**Poor Road Condition:**

Road infrastructure in the main town areas and areas with major potential is either lacking or not conducive to safe and efficient travelling. However, the road network is gradually being improved.
In most instances, what’s still missing are the access connections – reliable, safe services at competitive prices – between the areas that contain attractions and circuits within these areas that facilitate sightseeing.

**Lack of Quality Accommodation:**
The surveyed operators identified a shortfall in terms of both the quality and variety of accommodation provision. They noted that there was a limited availability of top class/exclusive accommodation and insufficient (3-star quality accommodation), though a number of operators did recognize a recent improvement in accommodation provision viz-a-viz the Ramakrishna Math & Mission run Yatri Niwas at Kamarpukur and Joyrambati. The private hotel operators are still shy of making investments in the hotel sector and there are just a few small hotels in Kamarpukur where the facilities are at best sketchy and unfit for catering to the discerning world traveler.

**Unreliablity of internal transport:**
The internal transport system within the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourism circuit is in shambles both in terms of frequency as well as comfort levels. Most private buses are overcrowded and the condition of the roads pitiable in certain stretches, thereby making road travel a cumbersome experience.

**Customer Service:**
A large proportion of the survey respondents feel that the service received in accommodation establishments, restaurants other tourist services is below par to that received in most other tourist destinations in the region. However, a significant number felt that, although the staff encountered were friendly and helpful, there was a general lack of training, resulting in a less than professional approach/attitude. Again the comment was made that the service element (as part of the overall product) provided was not to a high enough standard to justify the price being charged.

**Poor Quality Tour Guides:**
The standard of tour guiding received considerable criticism from all tour operators who felt the quality to be worse than in the competing destinations like ISKCON Mayapur for
instance. This needs to be addressed as a priority since the quality of tour guiding is fundamental to the holiday experience. All aspects of tour guiding received criticism – their knowledge, ability to communicate, and attitude.

**Overcrowding During the Festive Season:**
Although pilgrimage is the major attraction of the Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourism circuit, the unanimous opinion among the Kolkata based tour operators is that it is becoming overcrowded particularly in the festive season – Durga Puja, birth day of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi particularly in Kamarpukur and Joyrambati area. There are too few options for tour routes on the Circuit – only one road in/out and very limited accommodation choice.

**Security:**
In the aftermath of the recent terrorist attacks in India, the issue of security has now become the top priority issue for all countries. In common with the rest of the world, the state of West Bengal will have to implement a security regime to assure potential tourists of their safety in traveling to and within the state of West Bengal. This is expected to become a key determinant of tourism flows over the next decade.

**Service Standards, Training Needs and Facilities:**

**Service Standards:**
An assessment of operational standards carried out as an integral part of the Tourism Master Plan fieldwork in the year 2008 found that hotel and other tourism industry staff were invariably friendly and helpful but lacked many of the essential skills needed to do their job to the standard that is required if Gar Mandaran-Joyrambati-Kamarpukur tourist circuit is to compete successfully in the market for international tourism.

In-house training needs to be imparted by professionally qualified trainers. Managers agreed that there was a serious training problem, both at entry level and for existing staff within the industry.
The situation is not much different today. All categories of staff require training: hotel and catering staff, tour guides, drivers, and front office staff.

**Training Needs:**
An extensive programme is required to train
- management and staff currently employed in the industry, and
- training of new entrants at all levels.

It was estimated that HR training on this scale, particularly at craft level, cannot take place through the vocational school system alone. For this reason, there will have to be a substantial degree of on-the-job training. For those currently employed in the industry, seven priority-training areas have been identified as follows:

(i) Training and retraining of existing managers.
(ii) Development of middle management in supervisory skills development for the culinary arts, restaurant, housekeeping, front office, supervision, etc.
(iii) Retraining of existing staff to improve attitudes and customer relations.
(iv) Skills development for line staff - front office, kitchen, waiters, housekeeping, guides, travel trade, etc.
(vi) Train-the-trainer programmes for increased efficiency and productivity

For new entrants, improved training will be effected primarily at institute level through upgrading courses, teaching methods, etc.

**Tourism Training Facilities:**

The principal tourism & Hotel Management training facilities are the Institute of Hotel Management at Taratola in Kolkata, which is a government of India run institute and a few others like NSHM and DSSM in Durgapur. A few notable institutes are also operating from Salt Lake.
These hotel schools need to be coerced into action by the government so as to improve the skill sets of the tourism & hospitality staffs of the Gar Mandaran – Kamarpukur – Joyrambati tourist circuit.

While tourism industry managers considered course content to be acceptable, many staff have had insufficient training themselves with little direct experience of the hotel sector.

**Introducing Low Cost Tourism & Hospitality Courses in Educational Institutions:**

To create a true spirit of tourism, low cost Tourism and Hospitality courses may be introduced in the Secondary Schools run by the Ramakrishna Math & Mission at Kamarpukur. Although there is no dearth of quality Tourism & Hospitality courses administered by Kolkata based hotel schools, they charge an exhorbitant rate, which is beyond the reach of most rural youths of the Gar Mandaran – Kamarpukur – Joyrambati tourist circuit.

Leading educationists of the region along with active co-operation of the senior monks of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission could possibly find ways and means to incorporate the most suitable tourism curriculum in the secondary school system with the emphasis on practical orientation and incorporate Tourism as a subject in schools. It could be a major milestone in the annals of school education in rural West Bengal.

While developing courses on Tourism in the Gar Mandaran – Kamarpukur – Joyrambati tourist circuit, the following aspects must be considered –

(a) A course that has a local flavor along with the broader global implications of Tourism.

(b) Specialized courses on Travel Agency Management.

(c) Specialized courses in Tour Operations Management.

(d) Specialized courses in Computer Applications like SABRE, GALILEO, AMADEUS, SITAR etc….

(e) A course, which has cultural, heritage, environment preservation – natural and cultural.
(f) Practical field trips to airports, archaeological sites etc….

**Setting Up a Tourism Lover’s Forum:**

Since awareness of Tourism as a form of leisure and also as a means of earning revenue in null and void in this tourist circuit with no proper Tourism Governing Body, immediately calls for a setting up of a “Tourism Lover’s Forum” at Kamarpukur with the active involvement of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, senior citizens as well as the youth brigade.

To begin with, the “Tourism Lover’s Forum” is expected to conduct the following activities –

**Membership:**

Membership will be open to all the residents of the tourist zone, young and old and a nominal annual membership charge will be levied so as to sustain this important forum. There will be age classification on the basis of which separate activities and agendas for the young and the old will be planned and organized throughout the year.

The following wings may be created –

(a) The children’s wing comprising of children of primary schools.

(b) The youth wing comprising of students from standard XII to Bachelors Degree.

(c) The adult wing comprising of people with Master’s Degree, working professionals, entrepreneurs upto the age of 45.

(d) The senior citizen’s wing comprising of people above the age of 45.

Individuals with good leadership skills and excellent communication skills and with ability to work under pressure and yet be innovative may be chosen as Team Leaders to oversee the activities of respective Tourism Wings.

**Activities of the Tourism Lover’s Forum:**

(a) Creating awareness, publicity and PR campaigns on Tourism in the Gar Mandaran – Kamarpukur – Joyrambati tourist circuit.
(b) Persuade organizations like the Ministry of Tourism, WTO, PATA, and UNESCO etc of planned development of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati as an Integrated Tourist Circuit.

(c) Celebrate the World Tourism Day every year involving the local citizenry.

(d) Conduct workshops, seminars, video shows, road shows on Travel & Tourism at the state and national levels.

(e) Maintain an exclusive tourist library with good quality books on Tourism. Organizations like the British Council Library, American Library etc…may be approached for book and periodical donations.

All the above mentioned suggestions for creating an atmosphere of Tourism in the Gar Mandaran – Kamarpukur – Joyrambati tourist circuit, if practically implemented in the preliminary stages with active co-operation of the people, will go a long way in changing the mindset of the people of the neighborhood and the youths for whom a whole new world of opportunities will open up. The region will begin to prosper and the benefit accrued from the multiplier effect of Tourism. A stimulating atmosphere of cultural tourism will prevail as the discerning international tourists start visiting the circuit.

**Training of Women for their participation in Tourism:**

In course of the Master Plan preparation, interactions with the local Mahila Samity revealed that they were keen to learn new skills and participate in income generation for their families. They reported that they could find sometime for these activities during tourists season and relatively more time during off-season in summer. Therefore training needs to be given to women through Mahila Samitys, who in turn can train other women. Example can be given of a study done by United Nations Environment and Development UK Committee (UNED-UK) brought out that the tourism industry is an important sector for women (46 % of the workforce are women) as their percentages of employment in most countries are higher than in the workforce in general (34 - 40 % are women, ILO data). In the region, during the tourist season, the men in the household are busy operating their shops, restaurants
and hotels, which are essentially owned and run by the villagers itself. This leaves the women with keeping the household

In the survey, it was observed that there is a need to familiarise and train members of Mahila Samity members on tourism issues that emerge in the developmental debate. To have equal participation of local women in the tourism activities of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit there is an apparent need to bring them to the mainstream as well as to achieve growth of tourism in particular and the economy in general. The following measures needs to be undertaken -

• Identify opportunities and role of women, keeping in view their present occupation, skill sets, time spent on domestic activities and their willingness to participate in the economic activities.
• Increase the number of women who will be visibly involved in the tourism industry
• Educate and encourage women. Cite examples of sterling performance and input by a few women that are already involved in tourism
• Responsibility of local governments to ensure that women do get involved – legislation to ensure women are part of any local NGO/ group created.
• Training of members of women’s groups, like Mahila Samitys.

The training of Mahila Samity can be designed based on the following:
• Ways of creating self-employment for women in tourism and maximizing benefits for local communities.
• There are numerous examples where women and women's groups have started income generating activities on their own, for instance the Ramakrishna Math & Mission patronized “Pallimangal” wherein women are involved in incense stick manufacturing etc… These activities help to create financial independence for local women and challenge them to develop the necessary skills and improve their education. Such cases and case studies should be a part of the training course being offered to members of Mahila Samitys.
• Members of Mahila Samitys should be educated about markets and potential customers. Tourists need to be provided with more information about the benefits of buying locally and using local services.
• Support from NGOs, the private sector, governments and inter-governmental organisations can help women to realize their full potential, benefitting not only the women themselves but also the wider community.
• Support can take the form of specific measures such as the provision of micro-credit. The training course should introduce the concept of micro-credit to the Mahila Samitys.
• The need for participation of women in Tourism Planning and Management should be emphasized.

Women could be given training in the following activities to name just a few where they could contribute significantly:
• Running small household industries for making flower/other souvenirs, handicrafts, Jute bags etc. especially in the off season. Running of souvenir shops may be strictly reserved to women.
• Assist in providing medical first aid enroute the tourist circuit along with managing information kiosks.
• Plantation activities (tree plantation, fodder grass plantation, etc.) along the areas demarcated by the Panchayat, inclusive of lands identified for plantation in lieu of diverted lands for road/parking/trek path expansion, etc.).
Volunteer Opportunities

These days the discerning international travelers crave for an experience that is elevating and enriching. Today’s travelers are no longer interested in the “Homogenized Mass Tourism”. With the burgeoning growth of Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Tourism, the concept of “Volunteer Tourism” has now made its presence felt in the fast changing global tourism industry. One of the principal reasons for the growing popularity of “Volunteer Tourism” is the opportunity to travel safely and cheaply.

The volunteers who come from abroad provide the much-needed financial support to the rural or village community and in exchange, the volunteers receive accommodation, shelter and food. In this manner, both the overseas volunteer as well as the host community are able to experience each other’s culture and traditions. According to Dr. Stephen Wearing, who is regarded as an authority on Volunteer Tourism – “Volunteer Tourism will rival the popularity of Eco-Tourism in this decade”.

In the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, there will be opportunities galore for overseas volunteers to offer their skill and expertise in restoring the monuments, temples as well as natural and cultural heritage sites that are intimately connected with the life and times of one of India’s greatest spiritual giants – Sri Ramakrishna. The opportunity to live with a local family and even attending lively temple services with the simple village folks can indeed be a very rewarding experience.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is poverty ridden and according to Suzzane Edmonds from USA, who had recently visited the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati – “When you see the dreadful sight of poor children sifting through garbage, you inevitably tend to carry that image back home with you. And once you are at home, you marvel at the privileged life that you lead as you relax with the Jacuzzi”. 
An increasing number of people are joining the Volunteer Tourism bandwagon to make their holidays fun filled and joyous. From rebuilding homes in Tsunami-hit Southern India to teaching English in a remote hamlet in Thailand, Volunteer Tourism is on the rise.

It has finally dawned on the holidaymaker that it’s doubly exciting to perhaps lead a relief mission in earthquake hit Gujarat to donning the Scuba Diving gear to collect vital data related to the Dolphins in Australia’s Great Barrier Reef.

Volunteer Tourism is essentially tourism with ethics. The volunteers abhor the very idea of experiencing an alien culture through the windows of a hotel room or bus. Today’s volunteer tourist is quite willing to part company with a 5 star deluxe hotel room for a night’s halt in a poor fisherman’s hut in one of the remotest corner of planet earth. As tourists, they go back home with an experience that is elevating and that their holidays had a purpose, which no amount of “Sunbathing” could have bestowed.

As a philanthropic organization, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been providing charitable and philanthropic services to the poor and the needy. With a dedicated set of monks who are also experts in relief and humanitarian works, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has carved a niche for itself as an organization that has provided high quality humanitarian assistance to millions of underprivileged Indians.

Today as a result of extending unmatched humanitarian services to the nation for the past many decades, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has its own hospitals, mobile dispensaries, schools, colleges and Technical Training Institutes. Needless to say, there is always the need for skilled and qualified people who are in a position to impart education and training to the budding youths of India, offer the light of education among the tribal or even provide maternity facilities to the rural womenfolk.

The spirit of “Volunteerism” is particularly noticeable amongst North Americans, Australians, Western Europeans as well as the Japanese people.
To be brutally frank, Volunteer holidays are infinitely more taxing than a week at a beach resort. Volunteers would definitely require travel and health insurance. An accident insurance too may be required in cases involving travel to hazardous destinations. Of course, one has to admit that activities like raising charity for a worthy cause, embarking on village treks and improving people’s lives does look really impressive in one’s Resume.

Volunteer Tourism is known to have a “Domino Effect”. Volunteers from affluent western countries very often are known to sponsor holiday trips for the local host families with whom they share a deep understanding. While there are others who repeatedly keep on visiting their Volunteer Holiday Spot and kind of get captivated and obsessed with that holiday spot.

Volunteer Tourism isn’t just meant for the young and the agile lot. In fact, there are instances galore of people who are 60 plus, embarking on a Volunteer Holiday and being involved in challenging projects involving preservation of natural and cultural treasures in a destination of his or her choice.

As far as the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati are concerned, there are opportunities galore for volunteer tourism activities. Apart from the common activities like imparting education to the poor village folks and providing medical relief to the needy, one key area that might have a lot of relevance is to involve volunteers from abroad to be associated with the restoration of temples and structures that are intimately associated with the Ramakrishna Movement. Volunteers from affluent Western countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, France the Netherlands etc… may be offered with the opportunity to join the local community in their restoration efforts. This is one great opportunity for the people of the Western world to put their heart and soul towards the preservation and protection of one of the great spiritual centers of India.

There are many full time as well as lay devotees in the West, particularly in USA and UK who feel disconnected at the fact that they haven’t been able to offer their services to Sri
Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi in the manner they could have. If an opportunity were provided to them so that they may be allowed to work and serve as Volunteers during their holidays in India, it would be the perfect culmination to their long cherished desires.

As a matter of fact, Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna believed that it was through exchange of cultures between he East and the West that the world would become a better place. As a religious and philanthropic organization, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission works with the people belonging to diverse cultures and faith.
Attracting the Attention of the Indian Diaspora

The Indian diaspora is a broad based term, which is commonly used to refer the people who migrated from India’s present geographical area to some other country. The Indian diaspora is presently estimated to be in access of twenty million, which is indeed staggering. The Indian diaspora consists of Non Resident Indians (NRI) and People of Indian Origin (PIO). There are as many as twenty-two countries in the world that have been identified to have a concentration of at least a million ethnic Indians.

The Indian diaspora toady has carved a niche for themselves in the international community and they have earned the respect and admiration of the global community by dint of their hard work, perseverance and the zeal to succeed against all odds. Mention may be made of persons of the stature of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, music maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar, billionaire steel tycoon Lakshmi Niwas Mittal, Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri to name just a few.

In spite of their success and prosperity, the Indian diaspora have maintained their emotional attachment with their umbilical chord – “India” in terms of religion, culture, tradition and folklore. In order to sustain and nurture this symbiotic relationship, the Government of India, has set up an exclusive Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs for the benefit of the Non Resident Indians as well as People of Indian Origin.

The prospect of lucrative work opportunities abroad and the fact that most Indians belonging to the major cities and towns are highly skilled and educated apart from being very proficient in their profession, has led to a massive “brain drain” with the large exodus of Indians who migrate each year to foreign destinations in search of a better life.

The young and the mobile Indians leave their parents behind and the pain of separation is always there to both the parents as well as their children who decide to migrate abroad.
Those who have been living abroad for more than a decade and have children who are settled overseas are curious to know more about their native country or the country of their parents. Thus, each year the Indian tourism industry receives a large contingent of young overseas Indians, who come here with the sole intention of making themselves familiar with the great Indian culture, its 5000 year old heritage, traditions and folklore.

Some even come to brush up their language skills like Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi etc… Yet another set of people visit India for the purposes of pilgrimage and visit the holy places like the Golden Temple at Amritsar, Kalighat and Dakshineswar in Kolkata, the Aiyappa temple of Kerala, the Kamakshya temple in Guwahati, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Rameshwaram, Kanyakumari etc…

Considering the fact that there are millions of Indians spread all across the globe who are desperate to discover their roots and become acquainted with the ethos of Indian culture, heritage and spirituality, a trip to the native villages of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi (Kamarpukur and Joyrambati) can indeed be a very rewarding experience for the NRIs and their children.

Kamarpukur and Joyrambati have been sentimentally attached to the hearts of millions of devotees and followers of the “Ramakrishna Movement” as the place of genesis from where this movement spread worldwide to far away countries like USA, UK, Canada etc… by the pioneering efforts of Swami Vivekananda and his brother monks.

It is also true that awareness about the “Ramakrishna Movement” is pretty high in affluent countries like USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland and Netherlands. There are millions of devotees who have received “Initiation” or “Dikshya” from Belur Math, the worldwide headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission.

In America alone, there are Vedanta centers located in places like California, Boston, Chicago, Hollywood, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Washington DC, New York to name just
a few where the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda are preached.

In order to provide the discerning Non Resident Indian (NRI) travelers with seamless travel related services, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission could very well set up an In-house Travel Agency that would extend all the travel related services like airport transfers, accommodation, sightseeing etc… Designer holiday packages for both the elderly NRIs (aged 65 and above) as well as youth NRIs (aged 18-35) may be introduced. Negotiations may be carried out with some of India’s renowned airlines like Indian Airlines, Air India, Jet Airways, Kingfisher, Indigo, Spice Jet etc… to offer specially discounted airfares during the peak tourist season to lure the NRIs.

The Western world is witness to stress, frustration and emptiness. Grief, loneliness and despair. Those of us who have experienced any one of these know what a devastating effect it can have upon our lives. We lose our balance, our friends, our spouse and our family. Contentment is something we all treasure. But real contentment is the treasure of a very few.

People in the Western world are obsessed with “Vedanta” – a set of Indian religious scriptures, which are believed to be among the most ancient in the world. The process of spreading the eternal message of the “Vedanta Philosophy” was started by Swami Vivekananda. First in the USA and then in UK and the rest of Europe. Vedanta asserts that beneath this appearance, this flux, there is an essential, unchanging “Reality”, which it calls “Brahman” or the “Godhead”. One of the greatest human exemplar of the Vedanta Philosophy was Sri Ramakrishna himself who appeared in the world’s spiritual stage during the late middle years of the 19th century. It was from him that the great Swami Vivekananda learnt the essence of “Vedanta” which later on so successfully preached throughout America and Europe.

While in America, Swami Vivekananda preached India’s religious tolerance, her freedom of spiritual investigation and her ideal of total dedication in search of God. He preached
the “Universality of Religious Truth” and vehemently attacked materialism and strongly advocated spiritual experiment as against dogmas and creeds.

Swami Vivekananda’s lofty ideals based on the philosophy of “Vedanta” are still alive, courtesy the activities of the monks as well as lay devotees of the Ramakrishna Movement. Thus, a visit to the ancestral village of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati will not only broaden the spiritual horizons of the visitors but also provide an authentic experience of life in rural Bengal, the essence of which is sublime tranquility – a proposition which is very hard to find in today’s material world.
Tourism Development Policy Guidelines, Plan Schedule and Implementation

Tourism Development Policy Guidelines:
In reviewing the future development of the tourism sector, the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is faced with the inevitability of having to select between the alternative courses of action that are open. These relate to:

- The future character of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit
- Potential for product expansion
- Product formulation.

Future Character of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist Circuit:
The five key factors that will determine the character of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist Circuit are-

- The type of tourism (product experience) to be developed
- The quality of development
- The scale and design of development
- The rate of growth to be pursued
- The extent to which tourism development is dispersed throughout the circuit.

The following consensus on strategic guidelines emerged from discussions with key stakeholders and decision-makers during the Master Plan fieldwork and the tourism planning round table discussion convened by the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur.

(a) There is international marketplace recognition that the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit possesses a superior cultural / pilgrimage product and offers an authentic rural Bengal experience, has outstanding scenic beauty and countryside, a wealth of cultural / historical attractions and a friendly people. These are the ‘core values’, which must be protected and preserved as they confer a competitive advantage in the marketplace.
(b) The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is blessed with a number of internationally renowned pilgrimage/spiritual magnet attractions (e.g. the birth place of Sri Ramakrishna, the birth place of Holy Mother Sarada Devi etc.), which serve as “honey pots” and provide the base for investment in complimentary attractions and experiences. The uniqueness and authenticity of these major attractions are not negotiable and must be protected at all costs.

(c) There is a need to broaden and diversify the nature based tourism product offerings of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit into resort based special interest tourism and cultural tourism.

(d) The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpur-Joyrambati tourist circuit offers both natural and cultural attractions and there is huge potential for the development of niche segments of the market, viz: -

Special Interest: Bird watching, Botanical tours, Trips to farmlands etc.

Cultural Tourism: Heritage tours, Historical monuments etc.

Soft Adventure: Countryside Trekking, Bullock Cart Rides in the hinterland etc.


(e) Investment in resort based tourism will be fundamental to the long-term development of areas which have considerable potential because of their natural and cultural attractions, but do not have the ‘drawing power’ of ‘honey pots’ like ISKCON Mayapur in the district of Nadia. The establishment of resorts offering a range of leisure activities will attract long stay of up to a week – 10 days in this circuit.

(f) Investment should not be concentrated solely on large-scale enterprises, but should also focus on small and medium enterprises.

(g) To ensure that tourism development does not give rise to land-use conflicts on the one hand and, on the other, that the integrity of the circuit is maintained, zoning should be carried out – cultural / historical areas, resort areas, wetland areas etc.

Product Formulation:
The recommendation from the 1st Tourism Planning Workshop was that the core of the Master Plan strategy should be to develop an integrated tourism product that is capable of
attracting a low volume, high yield segment of the international tourism market to spend their entire holiday in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit. In other words the circuit would be seen as a ‘single destination’ and tourists would not need to include another destination in their holiday plans. The way to achieve this was seen to be to:

- Develop a range of special interest and activity products
- Develop a resort product
- Develop a cultural/historical tourism product

This recommendation on product development has been validated and reinforced at meetings with key stakeholders during the course of the fieldwork for this Master Plan update.

**Special Interest and Activity Products:**

The capacity within the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit to further develop a range of special interest products around wetland areas and nature is exceptional since the circuit has a unique resource base on which to establish a distinct competitive advantage over other similar tourist products. In addition, this circuit has a remarkable range of tourist attractions that provide the basis of many other quality special interest products, which include countryside treks, enchanting bullock cart rides, tribal tours, tours to rural hamlets, agriculture tours to name just a few for those seeking to pursue aspects of cultural interest.

**Resort Products:**

To ensure that the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit becomes a successful single destination in the high yield segment of the international tourism market will involve the development of a quality resort product. The natural resource attractions exist to achieve this on the riversides and lakes. Scale is particularly important. Development must be of a scale that is in keeping with the environment, but large enough to be economically viable to provide the services/ facilities associated with a quality resort.
Cultural/ Historical Products:
The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit has a varied and interesting pilgrim / spiritual culture that can form a central element in its appeal as a tourist destination. Clearly, the circuit has the capacity to provide a rewarding and satisfying cultural experience for a wide range of tourists but, at present, this potential is not being realized, largely because of a failure in presentation. This has to be rectified through a programme of conservation of historical sites/areas, the development of interpretative centers, the promotion of cultural activities. A good start has been made with the Cultural Tourism Programme that coincided with the birth day celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna at Kamarpukur wherein the renowned Baul folk musicians were invited to perform on stage that showcased the very best of rural Bengal culture in the year 2008-2009.

Combined Special Interest, Resort and Culture:
Central to the tourism sector of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is the capacity to offer a product that will combine the opportunity to pursue a special interest holiday and combine it with a period of relaxation in a small resort offering high standards of service and facilities and the opportunity to experience something of the spiritual culture of this famed circuit. Additional actions to achieve this involve:

- The enhancement and extension of the product through the development of additional circuits that pre-empt the need for any route back-tracking and bring on-stream a finer mosaic of attractions, thus enhancing what is on offer within each zone through the synergy created by a series of well-planned and coordinated area actions.

- The linking-up of contiguous zones to create larger more comprehensive in-country circuits that will extend the visitors’ length of stay, create more robust, competitive and marketable products, and direct development towards the ultimate marketing of the tourist circuit as a single destination.
Tourism Plan Schedule:
An issue of concern to tourism planners is how to sequence the recommended action programmes. Should the tourism product be expanded and standards improved prior to, or after, the establishment of a marketing campaign? Should institutional development and the creation of an environment conducive to enterprise development precede product development and marketing?

The greatest consensus appears to be to do all at once. This is not as simplistic as it appears at first sight. Because all the action programmes are so interlinked, trying to identify the best sequence is not a realistic goal. No single measure can bring much benefit without at least some progress in respect of the other actions. In this sense, it is more instructive to view the development of the tourism sector as a process rather than as a sequence of activities.

Establishing the appropriate institutional arrangements (policies, laws, incentives, etc.) will create the climate for enterprise development within the circuit on the one hand, and on the other, ensure the promotion of the state of West Bengal as a holiday destination in the different source markets. Manpower training, involving the transfer of knowledge and technology will ensure that the tourism industry can meet international standards of service and customer care. The combination of a trained workforce and the appropriate institutional arrangements will result in a competitive private tourism sector, attracting foreign investment and be attractive to holidaymakers.

Responsibility for Tourism Plan Implementation:
Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Plan rests with the Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal with the Director of Tourism being the focal point. However, as the Department has only direct control over those agencies that come directly within its ambit, a significant part of the task of implementation may be delegated to the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur, which will act as a coordinating body with other Government Ministries and Departments, and donor agencies.
It is clear that the Ramakrishna Math & Mission Kamarpukur will need additional training and external assistance to oversee the implementation of the Plan. The Plan and its component programmes will have to be continually managed and monitored if implementation is to be successful. The Master Plan recommends the establishment of a separate Programme Coordination Unit (or Section) within the Tourism Division. Attached to the unit should be an expert in tourism management and administration to assist the Ministry of Tourism in the implementation of the Plan.

A Convergence Committee consisting of Village Panchayats, SDO, BDO and District Magistrate will be ideal for the smooth flow of the developmental works. Representatives of the Department of PWD and Department of Transport too may be included in the Convergence Committee.
Role of the Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal

In the present case, the Master Plan for development of Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is prepared for the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

This project may ultimately be executed under the guidance of a state level tourism committee which may be constituted under the Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal whose purpose would be to evaluate the progress of tourism development, recommend eco-tourism projects with due provisions for safety and health care of tourists, and give policy based suggestions to state and central government. It should also support in destination promotion, sales, advertisement, and publicity.

The Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal may deliberate and formulate a comprehensive policy for regulation and management of Pilgrim Tourism and Sustainable Eco Tourism in this region, which gels with the requirements of the existing eco-tourism policy of the state of West Bengal. This would help in sensitizing the pilgrim tourists and spiritual institutions like the Ramakrishna Math & Mission which form a major component of the entire tourism in the region, to the needs of development and sustenance of environment friendly tourism in the region.

In this regard, the Government of West Bengal may initiate a dialogue with the Ramakrishna Math & Mission Management Trust and explore the options.

The Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal should formulate/control the guidelines to categorise the standards for infrastructure/hospitality for Hotel/Lodge/Restaurant business and other services in eco-tourism sector. The Department of Tourism may run registration and eco-certification program for businesses associated with nature/eco-tourism. The hospitality staff may be trained by the Department of Tourism and should sport uniforms/badges to indicate that these staff are well-trained service staff and are recognized by the Department of Tourism.
- The Department of Tourism should get associated with the District level Zilla Parishad and Panchayats to promote/publicize the rules for the tourism activities as defined by the Department of Tourism.

- The Department of Tourism should try to arrange external assistance/funding from multilateral agencies to execute the master plan for development of tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit in the best possible manner and make available financial support for training and running eco-tourism businesses.

- The Department of Tourism shall facilitate expression of interest/tendering process and development of basic infrastructure and public amenities and assist the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur and monitor the quality of the work.

The state level tourism committee should provide the following:

(a) Incentives (in terms of self-employment loan assistance, tax benefits/deferment for private sector participation, human resource development/training, etc.) and

(b) Rewards to those establishments/organizations in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit that show the best results in terms of managing shops/kiosks, toilet facilities, environmental protection and conservation, the best guide/nature interpreter, best hotel/lodge, restaurant with best ambience & hygiene, trek path, medical service, emergency rescue, etc.

- The Department of Tourism should create checks through a small monitoring committee to ensure that those who do not comply with environmental guidelines and notices should be penalized like tourists’ enroute pay a fine or by revoking the registration/license of shopkeepers/other service providers working in this area.
- The Department of Tourism may facilitate the collection and analysis of tourist arrival data/tourism statistics and preparation /monitoring of schemes for tourism development in the circuit.

- The Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal and the local management – The Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Kamarpukur shall also ensure that only consistent information is displayed that is supported by the official line, whether it is through signages/information boards/print media/electronic media/internet media, etc.
Marketing the Circuit

According to a Market Research carried out during the preparation of the Masterplan, it was decided that with the requisite tourism assets and attractions and with a ready infrastructure, a well coordinated Marketing, Advertising & PR campaign needs to be chalked out.

A marketing plan for the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit will involve the following steps-

(a) Market Research: To find out where the customers are, where they live, what they do and what there likes and dislikes are.

(b) Preparation of a marketing strategy on the basis of the findings of the above market research.

(c) Developing communication channels to let the potential customers know about the tourism product through Advertising & PR.

(d) Regular monitoring and evaluation of sales results.

A generalized marketing plan would first involve creating high quality but cost effective and eco-friendly promotional materials like brochures, folders, direct mail materials, display materials all of which come under the printed material category. Such printed materials should preferably be of re-cycled papers keeping in mind the nature of tourism in the circuit, which is eco-friendly and sustainable.

Brochures are one of the principal selling aids for tourist organizations who rely heavily on quality brochures for selling a destination. Good quality brochures on the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit as a unique spiritual-cum-nature based holiday destination should be produced containing detailed information on accommodation, prices, travel schedules, attractions for tourists, weather patterns with maximum and minimum temperatures in the backdrop of nicely done up photographs of the circuit and its surroundings. Illustrations, graphic design of the cover and the layout should be of a high quality.
On the other hand a folder is less voluminous than the brochure and is usually printed on a single sheet of paper, which can be folded. It can be successfully used in conjunction with a sales letter.

Besides good quality brochures and folders, sales letters too are very important. It is an effort through which an attempt is made to gain agreement or favorable action towards a tourist product.

Future tourism administrators and tourism managers of the circuit will have to identify potential clients and visitors who are likely to visit the circuit and prepare a mailing list which is a prerequisite for effective use of this tool.

Brochures, folders and sales letters ready, the next important and often very vital step is liaising and carrying out communications in the preliminary stages with reputed government and non-governmental organizations. A Public Relations Cell is a must for timely correspondences and effective communications involving prestigious organizations. The Public Relations Cell will be responsible to effectively utilize the brochures, folders, sales letters, special gift items etc… to communicate on a regular basis with the following organizations –

1. The Government of India Tourist Office located in 18 countries overseas for promoting the circuit. This service is free of cost by the government based upon the informative materials supplied by the local tourism administrators.
2. The Government of India Tourist offices within India for promoting the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit in the regional markets.
3. The West Bengal Department of Tourism for promoting the circuit as a spiritual & Nature Based holiday destination for the people of West Bengal.
4. Liaisoning with reputed and established travel agents and tour operators in Kolkata.

Apart from the above mentioned functions of the Public Relations Cell, there are a few additional assignments that the PR Cell will be required to do like for instance special
press releases on important events related to tourism in the circuit. For instance launch of a new resort, launch of water sports activities, launch of heritage tours etc. Feature stories with pictures, newsletters, screening of touristic films, audio visuals on the circuit, participating in travel exhibitions and fairs etc…. all of which are high on credibility when compared to advertising which is a paid public message and people these days tend to consider the Public Relations approach with much more respect and credibility since Public Relations is publicity secured free of charge.

Also advertising involves lots of money, which undoubtedly would make a heavy dent on the local exchequer. A pool of talented PR professionals who are smart and intelligent and know what the travel press is interested in should be recruited and employed as full time executives.

One of the greatest advantages of having a dedicated Public Relations Cell is that it creates and maintains a positive image of a destination in the minds of the people who are in a position to influence public opinion (journalists, editors, travel writers etc…) which will be of utmost necessity during the initial stages of the product launch and thereafter to keep up the positive image of the circuit in the travel and tourism circles.

Though advertising is a very costly affair, limited advertising in the leading newspapers of Kolkata like The Telegraph, The Statesman, The Times of India, The Hindustan Times etc… along with advertisements in the vernacular newspapers like the Ananda Bazaar Patrika, Protidin etc… may be carried out. All said and done, a public relations drive by way of individual write ups and columns in such leading newspapers and travel journals will be much more credible and effective.

There is another concept that is hugely popular is Projected Publicity. This form of publicity comprises of films and slide shows. Of particular importance is the film which is an outstanding publicity medium because of its suggestive power, though at times a little too costly. One way of securing projected publicity virtually free of cost is by inviting the popular Travel Channels of the television industry like the Discovery
Channel, BBC’s Travel wing etc…. All that is needed to attract them is by offering excellent hospitality and facilitating their day-to-day requirements like labor and transportation. The local tourism administrators should seriously consider inviting Kolkata based TV crews to prepare films on the circuit. Such films once produced can be effectively used as a marketing tool.

Given the fact that there are millions of the Bengali diaspora spread overseas and residing in affluent countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, France, Germany etc… who have a sentimental attachment to the birth place of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi, it would perhaps be in the fitness of things that this cash rich NRI Bengalis should be offered with attractive tour packages. It’s a fact that the quintessential NRI Bengali is desperate to show their children or send their children for holidays in India so that they can experience their motherland, which they had probably never seen and to be able to understand the great Bengali culture.

Exclusive tour packages with a range of incentives and discounts on hotel tariffs, airfares, special sightseeing arrangements etc… could be offered to the NRI Bengalis. A mailing list may be prepared based on the pilgrim’s register maintained at Belur Math and all the other branches of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission centers spread in India and also overseas.

The use of the Internet as a medium of publicity has a special relevance in the context of today’s connected world. Rising demand of tourists and the ever-increasing supply of new tourist destinations characterizes the present day situation in the world travel market. It’s a competitive world out there and the best way to make one’s presence felt is by launching a user-friendly website.

Internet travel today is a reality. Chiefly because of the convenience of 24 hours a day from anywhere availability. World wide travel through Internet has been pegged at US $ 25 billion and it is growing phenomenally.
It is proposed to develop a web enabled Visitor Management System (VMS) for the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit. This can be developed separately or can be integrated with the West Bengal’s Department of Tourism portal. The main objectives of this web enabled VMS would be to make available a database of all information pertaining to the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, a database of tour operators and transportation facilities, data base of accommodation and other tourist infrastructure (services and facilities) to the interested/potential tourists and information seekers, e-postcards, etc. In addition to this, database of tourists would also be captured. The VMS would also be a helpful tool to monitor the visitor management by systematic collection of data. Over the longer run, the system could take the shape of a portal through which tourists can book the lodges/ hotels as well as prebook their entry to the tourist circuit.