

Online tickets to Nagamale forest boost morale of trekkers, devotees

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Mysuru: The introduction of an online ticket booking system by the forest department for trekking circuits in Karnataka, including the famed Nagamale forest in MM Hills, has been welcomed by trekkers and devotees.

Access to the Nagamale Temple had been restricted since Feb 17 due to wildlife concerns following the Kumaraparthvathi incident.

Even devotees who had been undertaking barefoot walks to offer puja at Nagamale Temple for decades, after traversing and navigating the thick jungles of MM Hills sanctuary, were also restricted.

The livelihoods of many local tribals and residents who had been operating private vehicles ferrying devotees from MM Hills towards Indignatha en route to Nagamale, as well as locals selling snacks, fruits, and cool drinks along the stretch, have been affected following the restrictions.

Speaking to STOI, deputy conservator of forests of MM Hills Wildlife Sanctuary Santhoshkumar said that the forest department has decided to limit the entry to Nagamale forest by permitting only 300 devotees and trekkers daily through online booking. Through this trekkers and devotees will be sent in batches to Nagamale. One local guide will accompany each 20-member batch. Entry to Nagamale will start after a formal inauguration by district minister K Venkatesh next week, he said.

Mahadevaswamy, a Bedagampana priest in MM Hills, said that the entry to Nagamale has now brought cheer among several devotees as they were restricted by the forest department for the last few months. Many devotees from Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Mandya, Bengaluru, and surrounding areas, as well as neighbouring Tamil Nadu, have been offering puja at Nagamale Mahadeshwara Temple for hundreds of years by taking a barefoot walk after traversing through the thick jungles of MM Hills, he stated.

This historic cave temple is believed to be the site where Mahadeshwara, the local folk hero, undertook penance before revealing himself to his devotees. It is 14-km away from the temple. As the forest department has now lifted the restrictions with the online booking facility for both devotees and trekkers, they must not disturb the wild animals along the stretch, the sanctity of the temple, or pollute the pristine forest environment, he said.

Chief conservator of forests (Chamarajanagar Circle) T Heeralal said that as the govt has now allowed visitors to Nagamale forest through online booking, his department will keep a close vigil on all immoral and other illegal activities along the stretch by deploying additional staff. Issues like free entry to local devotees will be taken up after bringing it to the notice of the govt and seeking its permission, he said.