

Sabarimala pilgrimage: Pilgrims find facilities at railway stations inadequate

George Adimathra, TNN Dec 4, 2011, 06.41PM IST

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KOCHI: It is the season of pilgrimage and the period Southern Railway fills its coffers. Yet, those travelling to Sabarimala via Kochi find the railway stations in the city underprepared to meet the rush. A pilgrim stepping onto any of these stations faces numerous problems -- lack of enough toilets, absence of rest rooms, etc.

Sreenivasa Rao, a real estate businessman from Hyderabad, was seen lying down on the platform at South railway station. He had a sleeper class ticket and is entitled to space inside the second class waiting room. But pointing to the cramped waiting room he asked, "How can we go in; not more than 25 people can sit comfortably there.

"My team includes 12 men and 5 kids, and we are forced to sleep outside for want of space and comfort in the waiting room," he said.

The season also sees the arrival of plenty of foreign tourists. And local passengers form a regular stream. They face their biggest problem during the early morning hours, when the rush to the toilets and the bathing rooms is at its peak. It is quite uncomfortable having to scale long, meandering queues at that time.

"I find the condition deplorable. This happens every year. No one seems to have done anything about it," said Rao, who is visiting Sabarimala for the third time. The rush forces some of the pilgrims to take bath in the open at the extreme ends of the station, he said. According to railway officials, South station has nine toilets and bathrooms on platform no. 1, and five on platform no. 6.

However, the general tendency of the people is to crowd around the facilities on platform no. 1. That is the reason for such long queues, they said.

N Thyagarajan from Bangalore had another complaint.

The cloak room staff demands extra money for storing bags, he said. "For one bag, the charge is Rs 10, but if the bag is not locked they ask us to pay Rs 15, which we find unethical."

His fellow traveler, Rahul Narayan, an engineering student, said that Ayyappa Seva Sangam outside the station providing free food and drinking water was the only positive aspect he had found during his maiden trip to the shrine. "Since pilgrims have to observe strict penance during the period, most of them avoid complaining or demanding facilities," he observed.