

Book Review: The Art of Thinking Clearly by Rolf Dobelli

"I don't make predictions. I never have, and I never will." – Tony Blair

Introduction

Rolf Dobelli's book, *The Art of Thinking Clearly* briefly explains common human behaviors which can be interpreted as illogical behaviors. This book is a database of human biases, fallacies and illusions. The title of the book is misleading since people may think that it is a self-help book containing advice on "clear thinking". It is NOT. A more apt title would be "Human cognitive biases, fallacies and illusions". But then will it sell?

The Art of Thinking Clearly by Rolf Dobelli

Dobelli uses simple, direct and engaging writing to explain 99 human cognitive behaviors in individual chapters spanning 2 to 3 pages. What I like most about the book is that it is full of interesting quotes, stories and anecdotes. It makes reading pleasant and entertaining. Each chapter provides a brief overview of the bias, overview of relevant scientific studies and finally author's own advice on the matter. You should take the advice with a grain of salt unless of course you want to become a world-class jerk.

In *The Art of Clear Thinking*, Dobelli claims that most of our biases are the result of human evolution. Assume that you are born thousands of years ago and you are walking in a forest with your friends. Suddenly all your friends start running. You wouldn't stop and think before running after them unless you want to end up as lunch for the resident Tiger. People who did think for long quickly exited from human gene pool! Dobelli claims that these behaviors are no longer useful in the modern world where logic and reasoning is the king. However in the epilogue, he admits that he himself doesn't follow his own advice. Thinking is too tiring to be done every time you need to make a decision!

The Art of Clear Thinking is heavily influenced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb's books ([Antifragile](#), [The Black Swan](#), [Fooled by Randomness](#)). This has led to allegations of plagiarism by Taleb. Taleb claims that Dobelli not only picked ideas but also sentences from Taleb's works. Taleb's accusations are [here](#) and Dobelli's response is [here](#). Other influences on the book are ideas by Warren Buffet and the book [Thinking, Fast And Slow by Daniel Kahneman](#). There are also plenty of references to scientific studies on human behavior, some of which are very interesting! (See – [Marshmallow Test Video](#) and [Monkey Business Illusion](#)).

I think it is important for key decision makers to be aware of human cognitive biases. Many of the logical decisions we make can have disastrous effects if we are not aware of these biases. Here is a classic example from the book (Never pay your lawyer by the hour),

In 1947, when the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered, archaeologists set a finder's fee for each new parchment. Instead of lots of extra scrolls being found, they were simply torn apart to increase the reward. Similarly, in China in the nineteenth century, an incentive was offered for finding dinosaur bones. Farmers located a few on their land, broke them into pieces and cashed in. Modern incentives are no better: company boards promise bonuses for achieved targets. And what happens? Managers invest more energy in trying to lower the targets than in growing the business.

Similarly I see confirmation bias every single day on my Facebook feed. People share complete lies without even doing a cursory check for its accuracy simply because it conforms to their beliefs.

For a happy, contented life we should be able to control our thoughts and behaviors. Take for example, the [paradox of choice](#). Beyond a level, more choice doesn't translate to better life or more happiness. Rather it can lead to unhappiness and stress! Another one of the human weaknesses is our tendency to fall into [Hedonic treadmill](#). The more we achieve, the more we want. The happiness from our possessions are very short lived. These are some of the fallacies covered in the book. But then it is precisely these human imperfections which makes us human. It is the same weaknesses which creates heroes. We need to be aware of our cognitive imperfections, but in many cases our "gut feel" is better than logical thinking. Sometimes we simply don't have the time for logical thinking!

One thing that I don't like about the book is the lack of sources and references at the end of the book. An online link for sources is given in the book which no longer works. Authors must ensure that everything part of the book remains in the book since there is no incentive for the publisher to keep online pages available.

Review Summary

The Art of Thinking Clearly is an excellent and entertaining book providing a good overview of human cognitive behaviors. With plenty of anecdotes, stories and quotes, this book is an ideal book to read during your travels. This book can make you aware of human biases which may positively affect your decision making.

The Pope asked Michelangelo: "Tell me the secret of your genius. How have you created the statue of David, the masterpiece of all masterpieces?" Michelangelo's answer: "It's simple. I removed everything that is not David."

My Rating: 8/10

Online Resources

- [Book: The Art of Thinking Clearly](#)
- [The Marshmallow Test \(Video Depicting Hyperbolic Discounting Bias\)](#)
- [The Monkey Business Illusion \(Video Depicting Illusion of Attention\)](#)

Further Reading

- [Antifragile by Nassim Nicholas Taleb](#)
- [Fooled by Randomness by Nassim Nicholas Taleb](#)
- [The Black Swan by Nassim Nicholas Taleb](#)
- [Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman](#)
- [Paradox of Choice by Barry Schwartz](#)

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Book Review: Freakonomics by Steven Levitt

Introduction

Freakonomics is a collection of interesting problems and a look at how statistical methods lead to surprising answers to these problems. Since the author (Steven Levitt) is an economist, he looks at them with an economist's eyes focusing on the incentives that drive people behind



these problems. It obviously helps to sell the book when the problems and solutions are "controversial". For example, Steven statistically concludes that one of the major reasons for reduction in crime rate in US is legalized abortion! Such conclusions obviously generate a lot of heat.

Book Review: Freakonomics by Steven Levitt

Freakonomics is written by economist Steven Levitt and journalist Stephen Dubner. It has sold over 4 million copies worldwide. It is based on various articles and papers written earlier by Steven Levitt. Each chapter deals with an interesting question,

- What do school teachers and sumo wrestlers have in common?
- How is Klu Klux Klan like a group of real estate agents?
- Why do drug dealers still live with their moms?
- Where have all the criminals gone?
- What makes a perfect parent?

These questions and the statistical solutions to these questions are pretty interesting. The question about Klu Klux Klan and real estate agents is interesting and the conclusion about "experts" hoarding their "specialized knowledge" is something I could closely relate to. For example, doctors have been using "specialized knowledge" to confuse and fleece patients. However the Internet has been a major liberator from such "experts" since much of the "specialized knowledge" is publicly available. We also tend to overestimate the "specialized knowledge" available with "experts".

The book also has a bonus matter section with additional questions and analysis. This sections explore questions such as why we vote and the economics behind gift cards. This section is followed by a Q&A session with the authors.

I personally think that one of the biggest contributions of this book is that it forces people to be critical of the things that are pushed to them as good or as essential. For example, take the case of vaccinations (this example is NOT from the book). It is almost always projected as good thing. But in reality, there is a trade off to be made between the known and unknown side effects of a vaccine against the risk of contracting a specific disease. If there is a 1% chance of contracting a specific disease and in contracted patients if there is 1% chance of death, is vaccination against that disease worth the 0.1% side effects and the possible long term impact on health?

Take another example of global warming or tree conservation (again NOT from the book, however a new book named Superfreakonomics seems to address these topics). Both these are given much more importance than they actually need. It is always important to ask the question, who actually benefits from the scare of global warming or the scarcity of cheap raw material such as wood (trees) which can be easily replenished?

One of my favourite chapters is the one dealing with parenting. I see parents all around me who try everything in their power to make their children better. I have always suspected that parenting has a lesser influence on a child than his genes and his peer group. It appears that what matters in the case of a child is how parents live/what parents are NOT what parents do!

Freakonomics is an interesting read. The authors have done a good job in making even the statistical part seem interesting. The book encourages us to be alert on what we do and what others do and look for reasons behind it.

The Q&A section at the end contains a pretty argument as to why you should read this book!,

Q: Am I worse off for never having read Freakonomics? – Terry

A: Sadly, yes. Independent testing has shown that people who read Freakonomics have sweeter-smelling breath, better posture and more interesting dreams. Also women feel no pain during childbirth; male readers find that their sperm swim faster.

My Rating: 8/10. An excellent book of interesting problems and interesting trivia. If you are a blind follower of "experts", this is an eye opener!

Online Resources

- [Book: Freakonomics](#)
- [Steven Levitt \(University of Chicago\)](#)
- [Steven Levitt on why car seats for children is useless](#)

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Gavi Ecotourism



Introduction to Gavi Ecotourism

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Gavi Ecotourism is a tourist program conducted by Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC) near Gavi village in Periyar Tiger Reserve forest. This program consists of multiple events conducted in and around Gavi dam, Gavi lake and the adjacent forest areas. KFDC programs at Gavi are,

- **Day trip to Gavi** – This is a day trip from 6AM to 4PM. Currently there is no option to book online and you will need to go to Kumily(Thekkady) to book this. This is usually opted by tourists coming staying in Thekkady. For more details, check with KFDC contact numbers.
- **Green Mansion Lodge Stay** – Overnight stay at Gavi in rooms. This is quite near to the Gavi lake.
- **Swiss Cottage Tent Stay** – Overnight stay in tents which are protected by electrified fence. More privacy and a relaxed forest stay is offered here. This place is located before Gavi dam.
- **Jungle Camping** – Up to 4 persons can stay in deep jungle after trekking to the location.

FOR SALE		
	Rs.	UNIT
SANDAL WOOD	11	1 gm
SANDAL OIL	600	2 gm
- do -	1500	5 gm
- do -	3000	10gm
CARDAMOM	60	50 gm
PEPPER	90	200 gm
LEMON GRASS OIL	175	100ml
EUCALYPTUS OIL	150	100 ml
VANILA EXTRACT	95	40 ml
GREETING CARDS	100	10 nos
TREKKING BAG	550	Each
RAIN COAT	600	Each
TARIFF (Per PAX)		
DAY PACKAGE	Rs.	1000
JUNGLE LODGE	Rs.	2200
COTTAGE TENT	Rs.	2500
JUNGLE CAMP	Rs.	10000
<small>(Minimum rate for 4 pax - Rs. 2500 for extra pax)</small>		
1/2 Rate for Children of 6 to 12 yrs age		

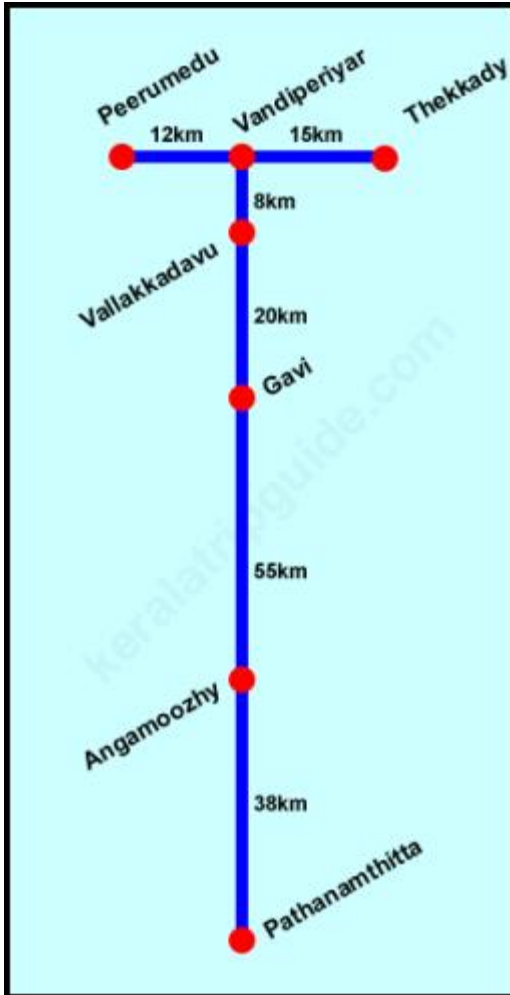
All programs include food and a number of free activities (trekking, jeep safari and boating). Up to date details of these programs including tariff are available at the [KFDC Gavi website](#). Gavi has no other facilities (apart from a small local hotel in the nearby Gavi village). Also before you plan your trip, always call up the KFDC contact numbers to confirm program details.

Usually you need to pay the room tariff up front by transferring money to KFDC bank account and cancellation charges are pretty high. You also need to inform them about your vehicle number one day before your arrival at Gavi. The per person tariff is around Rs.1000 for day trip and Rs.2000 for overnight stay.

Facilities at Gavi include the KFDC restaurant, a small eco shop at the KFDC reception from where you can purchase a limited set of items (see photo), a small library and cell phone coverage only for BSNL mobiles.

Gavi Ecotourism – Getting There

Gavi is a forest village inside Periyar Tiger Reserve and is part of Pathanamthitta district. It is accessible by road from northern Vandiperiyar town and from southern Angamoozhy



village. The Gavi ecotourism spot which includes the Gavi dam and Gavi lake is located about 500m away from the Gavi village. Gavi is located about 28KM from Vandiperiyar town and about 55KM from Angamoozhy village. The entrance from Vandiperiyar side is very restricted. Only vehicles with prior permission is allowed to cross Vallakkadavu check post located about 8KM from Vandiperiyar and about 20KM from Gavi. This restriction is due to the fact that forest areas here belong to the Periyar Tiger Reserve. The entrance from Angamoozhy historically has been much more lenient since it doesn't belong to the Tiger reserve. However due to the sudden influx of tourists via Angamoozhy after Gavi was featured in Malayalam movie "Ordinary", now entry restrictions are in place. Now only 10 vehicles are allowed entry during weekdays and 30 vehicles are allowed entry during weekends. This entry is only allowed between 6AM and 12PM. The vehicles entering from Angamoozhy are not supposed to exit from Vallakkadavu unless they are guests of KFDC (they issue exit and entrance pass for their guests). Forest department is also planning to completely block entry of private vehicles from Angamoozhy once forest department starts their own bus safari till Gavi. This sort of bus safari is usually complete waste of money as I have seen the same in Siruvani (Palakkad).

Gavi Ecotourism Distance Chart

Vandiperiyar	28 km
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Thekkady	43 km
Angamoozhy	55 km
Pathanamthitta	93 km
Alappuzha	160 km
Cochin Airport	164 km
Ernakulam	170 km

If you have booked a KFDC Gavi Ecotourism package, you are supposed to enter Gavi via Vallakkadavu check post. KFDC sends the entry pass one day before your arrival to the check post.

The entry fee at Angamoozhy Kochandi check post is Rs.50 for car. At Vallakkadavu check post the entry fee calculation is bit complex and it took the officer on duty sometime to calculate it! There is a per person entry fee (Rs.25 for adults and Rs.10 for children), vehicle entry fee (Rs.50) and then camera entry fee (Rs.25).

Activities at Gavi

KFDC organized programs consists of a number of activities. Usual activities include,

- **Gavi Lake Boating** – This is paddle boat trip to a nearby waterfall in the Gavi lake. life jackets are mandatory and the guide will take you in the boat.
- **Trekking Around Gavi** - There are around 25km of trekking path in and around Gavi. Usual trek path goes around the jungle on the other side of the lake returning back to the main road and then crossing over to the Sabarimala view point.
- **Jeep Safari Along the Jungle Road** – The early morning jeep safari is usually from 6AM to 8:30AM and covers Gavi village, Kochupamba etc. towards Angamoozhy. They usually cover about 15 to 20KM along this stretch.
- **Visit to Sabarimala View Point** – This is very close to the Gavi reception area and is a 15 minute uphill walk to a meadow. You can see Sabarimala usually partially hidden among the mist. Ponnambalamedu mountain can be seen on the left and pullumedu mountain can be seen on the right. You can also see the road to Vandiperiyar from here. Take a binocular if you have one.
- **Visit to Animal Museum** – There is an animal museum nearby. We never got time to visit it!

In addition to the above there are activities available near Gavi such as boating in Kochu Pamba lake and jungle stay. Ask at reception for details of these. It appears that the addition of Gavi into the Tiger reserve has put a brake on the expansion of eco-tourism activities.

The following map will give you an idea about Gavi geography and where activities are organized.



Gavi Wildlife

Gavi is now part of Periyar Tiger Reserve and there is abundant wildlife in and around this place. You can spot various exotic types of butterflies and insects if you look for them in the vegetation around. Always look at the tree branches for spotting monkeys, squirrels etc. Some of the commonly spotted animals in Gavi are,

- Malabar Giant Squirrels, Elephants, Sambars, Gaurs, Lion Tailed Macaque, Barking Deers, Mongoose, Nilgiri Marten, Civets, Bears, Wild Boars, Wild Dogs, Leopards, Nilgiri Tahr, Nilgiri Langur etc.

Commonly spotted birds in Gavi include,

- Great Indian Hornbill, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Blue Winged Parakeet, White Bellied Fishing Eagle, Brown Fish Owl, Forest Eagle Owl, White Shouldered Kite, Crested Serpent Eagle, Parakeets, Bulbuls, Wayanad Laughing Thrush, Skylarks and Pipits, Sunbirds, Mynas, Woodpeckers including Great Black Woodpecker, Kingfishers, Flycatchers etc.

Gavi Trip Report – Swiss Tent Stay – November 2013

In November 2013, My brother and I decided to visit Gavi along with family. A week before our planned date I called up KFDC office at Gavi and asked for availability of tent accommodation. He replied that tents are available and in order to book them I need to transfer the entire tariff to their Vandiperiyar bank account. That seemed a bit scary, but there are no other options available at Gavi and since KFDC is a government run facility I decided to take the risk.

I made a NEFT bank transfer to KFDC bank account for booking 2 tents at Gavi and called up KFDC to confirm my stay. I was asked to call one day before our check-in date and inform our vehicle number. This is required for them to arrange vehicle passes at Vallakkadavu forest check post.

The bank account of KFDC, Gavi to which I made money transfer was,
 KFDC, Account No: 362801010021042, Union Bank of India, Vandiperiyar.
 The IFSC code is UBIN0536288.

Needless to say always double check the account details before you do the money transfer. The details given here are only for double checking what you heard from KFDC contact numbers!



We started early morning from Ernakulum and headed towards Vandiperiyar. After a slow drive through scenic KK road and a quick visit to Pattumala church we reached Vandiperiyar just in time for lunch. Our check-in time at Gavi was 2pm and the package included evening tea, dinner, breakfast and lunch (next day). We had our lunch in Vandiperiyar and then proceeded to Gavi at around 2pm. At Vallakkadavu check post our entry pass was ready. We had to pay entry fee, vehicle fee and camera fee at the check post.



The 20km drive from Vallakkadavu to Gavi is through thick jungle which is part of Periyar Tiger reserve. This stretch offers excellent opportunity to see wildlife. After a couple of Kilometers, we spotted a single tusker elephant on the meadows to the left of the road. It was away and was partially hidden in thick undergrowth. We also spotted different types monkeys and came across beautiful butterflies.

When we were driving to Gavi, a lot of tourists were returning from their day trip at Gavi in hired jeeps. One of the jeeps slowed down and the driver asked us in Tamil whether we had seen the elephant and where it was located. My brother replied in Tamil. The exchange went on for a while in Tamil and suddenly the jeep driver asked us whether we are Malayalees in Malayalam and we replied – Yes! He literally did the face palm. His embarrassed reaction was quite amusing. He assumed we were Tamilians since our vehicle number started with TN!

The road here is narrow, but is in pretty decent condition. We went slow and reached Gavi around 3pm one hour late than our planned check-in time.

When you drive through forests, keep the speed low at around 15-25km/hr. This way you have a higher chance of spotting wildlife. Also slow down when you are at a curve and be prepared to spot wildlife just around the curve. Here is another technique I use when traveling with family. I ask my wife to look for wildlife in the trees on one side and my children to look at the trees on the other side. We have spotted lion tailed macaque, Indian giant squirrel etc. using this technique in most of our trips.

We parked our car after the Gavi dam and checked in at the reception counter. All of us had to sign in a register and the receptionist told us about rules and regulations in a tiger reserve. We were also given an instruction leaflet, entry coupons and was assigned a guide (Kannan). Note that you will be signing a exclusion of liability which means that Gavi eco-tourism will not be liable for any personal injury.

Kannan was from Gavi village and he had over 10 years experience as a forest guide. He was the best forest guide I have ever been with – knowledgeable, helpful, courteous and a true guide!

Gavi Eco Tourism

KERALA FOREST DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.,

(A Govt. of Kerala Undertaking)

GAVI DIVISION. GAVI P.O., (Via) VANDIPERIYAR Ph : 04869-223270, 9947492399

www.govcotourism.co, gaviecotourism@gmail.com

Registration No.....

Date.....

No. of Pax:- Adults.....

Children.....

Check in Time:.....

Check out Time:..... 7.30 pm

EVENTS

1. Trekking in the forest trails - We have 25 kms of marked trek paths. The duration of trekking depends on your fitness.
2. Boating in Gavi Lake - rowed by Guides only.
3. Visit to Cardamom plantations and Curing Store, Sabarimala view point and Museum of Animal Skelitons.
4. Jungle safari in our vehicle from 6 AM to 8 .30 AM. with full seating capacity

CONDITIONS :

1. Consumption of *Liquor* in the premises is strictly prohibited.
2. Intoxicated persons will not be permitted to take part in any of the events.
3. Avoid Smoking inside restaurant.
4. Avoid bringing food items from outside.
5. Follow the instructions of the Guide - Plese remeber that he is "Guide", not servant.
6. Avoid carrying anything while Boating.
7. Keep silence - you are in a reserve forest.
8. Avoid music system and sound box.
9. No outdoor programmes between 6 PM to 6 AM
10. Loss to Govt. properties, if any, will be recovered as assessed by the Management.
11. Food will be served only in restaurant.
12. Stick to the dining time -

Breakfast	-	8.30	to	9.30
Lunch	-	12.30	to	2.00
Evening tea	-	4.00	to	4.30
Dinner	-	7.30	to	8.30
13. Check out time : 24 hours or 2 PM on next day, whichever is earlier.

Please not that you are in an eco-tourism Centre, not in a Luxury Hotel. Expect minimum facilities.

Leave only footprints and take away memories only. Kindly co-operate with us to keep the environment clean and undisturbed.

Signature of group leader:

Name :

The Swiss tents were located away from the reception/canteen/boating area on the other side of the Gavi dam. We walked along the road to reach the tent area located on the right side of the road towards Vandiperiyar. Guide took us till the tents, gave us the keys and said he will be waiting for us at the reception area and recommended we should go on the boat ride.

The forest tent was neat and clean; mineral water bottles and other basic necessities were already arranged in the tent. A tea kettle and hot water facilities are also provided. The tent also had a proper attached toilet. All the tents faced the lake and you could spend hours relaxing in chairs provided in tents. I really wish I could afford spending a week here doing nothing other

than reading and watching wildlife. If you are lucky you will be visited by deer, squirrels, monkeys and who knows even a leopard!



We quickly deposited our bags inside, got ready and was on our way back to boating dock by 4pm. We had tea and biscuits from the canteen. Canteen and boat dock is located on the opposite side of the reception building. There is beautiful garden on the road side and you need to go through a tunnel decorated with a flowering plant called Clock Vine(*Thunbergia mysorensis*) to reach the canteen. Whoever planted this is a genius since it attracts a large number of small beautiful birds and combined with their sounds the whole place feels magical!



When we came out of the canteen, Kannan was ready with a paddle boat and life jackets! The paddle boat requires some patience to get in especially for families with children. Always ensure that boat is steady and weight is balanced on the sides.

Boating in Gavi Lake

Since it was late, almost all of the day trip folks had left and there were only few guests for night stay. We were the only ones on the lake. Kannan was also an expert on the paddle boat and patiently answered all our questions and queries. The lake was calm and serene. The silence and the misty lake gives a heavenly experience if you are a nature lover.



Kannan took us to a waterfall nearby on the lake and since we were alone, we decided to take a quick dip in the river. While walking to the waterfall, my daughter suddenly pointed us to a snake. This was my first encounter with green pit viper! Kannan told us that he will be in trance stage till it becomes dark and told us that getting bitten is fairly common when staying in the forest. This gave us extra motivation to get out of the waterfall before night fall.

After the boating, we sat on the benches near the canteen and just spend our time in front of the pristine and serene lake. It is a shame that such views are now available only for a price!

At 7:15pm we were served with delicious chicken soup and was followed by a sumptuous non vegetarian buffet dinner. After dinner we went back to our tents since we were all tired after the long trip and boating.



Kannan told us to be ready by 5:50AM for our 6:00AM jeep safari towards Angamoozhy (south bound).

Before we slept we started hearing noises from the other side of the lake (the tents are adjacent to the lake). Our night security guy (John) came running to tell us that elephants are on the other side and we are safe since we are protected by the electrified fence. After he left, we went near the fence to see if we can get a glimpse of the elephant herd.

The elephants seems to have started crossing the lake and we could hear their breathing! Then we heard folks on the boat landing side making noises to scare the elephants away. This is required since the other area is not protected by electric fence. We went back to bed and heard various noises and howls till we slept. The tents are not for the weak hearted!

Gavi Jeep Safari



By 5:45AM we were all ready for a jeep safari and at exact 6AM Kannan was there with an open jeep. The jeep is hired by KFDC and is included in the package. However jeep drivers do expect tip and I always ensure that tip is proportional to their service. Kannan asked whether we want the jeep roof closed since we were with children and I noticed that our guide was very considerate and helpful.

The open jeep ride was pretty exciting and we spotted multiple elephant herds along the way. We also came across a herd of gaurs on a meadow. The misty weather was the only disappointment. On the way back we got really lucky and spotted a big family of lion tailed macaque!



While returning from Safari, our driver asked whether we want to stop for tea at a shop. He slowed down the jeep but I replied that we would have our breakfast from the canteen. My wife later scolded me for being selfish since the stop was actually needed for the driver/guide. We bought some snacks from the only restaurant at the Gavi village on the way back.

Gavi Jungle Trekking

After an excellent buffet breakfast consisting of bread toast, uppuma, aval with banana, omelette, pineapple/grapes etc. I set out with my brother and our guide (Kannan) for a trek. Our families went back to the tents for some rest.



Gavi has around 25km of trekking path. The most preferred path actually starts from the other side of the lake after taking a boat from canteen area. This path is actually formed by elephants coming to the lake for water. We started our trek casually and Kannan told us more about the flora around this place. We also came across fresh elephant dung. On our trek we reached upstream of the waterfall in which we had bath on the previous day's boating trip.

When you go on the trek, always stick with the guide and follow his instructions. Never make loud noises. Elephants can be deadly if you are too close to them and in a thick jungle it is easy to miss them until you are too close to them. When you are near an elephant herd, they usually give you warning with grunting sound and you should gradually move away from them by walking backwards. Never use flash when you are photographing an elephant herd in close range.

After an hour of trekking we came across a herd of elephants on our right side. We also met other trekking teams hiding and watching the elephant herd. All of us decided to move around the herd to get a good view. Then suddenly our guide indicated us to stop. He asked us to wait and then cautiously proceeded to the direction opposite to where the elephant herd was standing. He then indicated to join him without making any sound and then we noticed another herd of elephants coming from the direction that our guide has gone! Without our guide, we would have probably ended up right in front of these elephants!

After the elephant encounter we proceeded to the southern part of Gavi lake crossed over and then reached the main road. We crossed the main road then headed towards the Sabarimala view point. Even here you can spot wildlife and we spotted a Sambar. It was almost 1pm when we reached the view point. There was lot of mist and Sabarimala was faintly visible between Ponnambalamedu and Pullumedu. From view point it is 10 minute walk back to the Gavi reception area.

On the way back we spotted a structure which looked like a tree house but it was small and stood on the ground. We were curious as to what it is and Kannan told us that earlier there was no BSNL mobile tower and hence the staff used to climb up this structure to get mobile signal!



After a quick bath we went for the lunch. It was a sumptuous vegetarian buffet lunch with lot of side dishes. After lunch we took rest on the benches near the lake. By 3PM we checked out from the place, received our exit pass (which should be given at Vallakkadavu check post) and we were on our way back home. Surprisingly we didn't find much of wildlife while returning back. However Gavi gave us one last glimpse of its rich wildlife in the end; A wild rooster crossed the road majestically in front of our car reminding us that the place belonged to them!

Gavi Travel Tips

- Always carry some salt with you for leech bite protection. Usually your guide will carry it when you are going on a trek. But even then it is best to carry some along with you. When you get a leech bite, the best way to remove them is to pour some salt on it. Leeches are fairly harmless if you don't try to forcefully remove them.
- A binocular is highly recommended if you want to get a close view of Sabarimala. I usually carry a 10x Nikon.
- No activities are usually allowed before 6AM and after 6PM. At night It is a pretty good idea to be indoors. The dam and the buildings around do give a false sense of security, but remember that you are right in the middle of a forest with plenty of animals! If you are with small children, always ensure that you are near them!
- Alcohol is not allowed in Periyar Tiger Reserve. If you are crossing the border from Kumily, never bring alcohol bottles across the check post unless you like getting harassed, losing the bottle and paying a hefty fine. KFDC has a more liberal view towards responsible drinking, but Kerala forest department doesn't share this sentiment.
- If you are just staying for one day, the activities make it a hectic holiday. I recommend either staying for 2 days or skipping either the trek or jeep safari.

Gavi Village – Historical Background

When Sri Lanka became an independent nation in 1948, there was a large number of South Indian Tamils in the country who were originally taken there by British as estate workers. In 1948 Sri Lanka passed the Ceylon Citizenship Bill which denied citizenship to a large percentage of Tamils. In 1964 Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Sri Lankan Prime Minister

Sirimavo Bandaranaike signed the Sirima-Shastri Pact under which India agreed to give Indian Citizenship to about 525,000 Tamils.

Around 150 Tamil families from Sri Lanka were rehabilitated on the cardamom plantations near Gavi and Pachakkanam. Later these plantations came under Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC). Even after 40 years, Tamils are still struggling to have a decent life and recent inclusion of Gavi and surrounding areas into Periyar Tiger Reserve made their life much more difficult. It is a sad fact that the our activities to protect tiger doesn't take into consideration the hardship suffered by the local human population. Even their right to travel is pretty much restricted due to multiple check posts along the way.

Now there are around 1500 people (400 families) living around Gavi and Pachakkanam. KFDC is also doing bad in cardamom business which in turn affected livelihood of Tamils living there. The Gavi Ecotourism project gave KFDC much needed money and it also is currently giving the local population a decent way to live. Most of the younger population now work as expert forest guides or staff for the Gavi Ecotourism project.

Gavi Photos





Summary

Gavi is a paradise for nature/wildlife lovers. It is a suitable destination for families and bachelors with an interest in nature. When it comes to material comforts, what is provided is basic but yet sufficient to keep you happy.

Online Resources

- [Gavi Eco-tourism Guide](#)
- [Gavi Eco-tourism – Official KFDC Website](#)
- [Hindu Report on Plight of Families in Gavi](#)
- [Analysis of Indo-Ceylon Agreement \(1964\)](#)