

SWOT ANALYSIS OF UDAYGIRI ROCK-CUT CAVES AS A POTENTIAL TOURISM PRODUCT

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ABSTRACT

India is a country with diverse culture and diverse heritage tourism products and might be such diversity is the reason that many of its heritage tourism products remained untapped or less approached by tourists. Among such a list lies India's rock-cut caves as except few caves like Ajanta, Ellora, Badami, etc most of the caves are not given the required attention. In this study, we will examine the potential of such caves as a potential tourism product. Since it was impossible to cover all the rock-cut caves of India, we have taken the Udaygiri rock-cutcaves from the Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh as our study area. SWOT analysis is used to identify the potential and scope of rock-cut caves based on the exploration of the site and secondary data resources. Through this study, we will highlight the factors behind the reason why such tourist sites are still playing as an underdog in the tourism market? And the measures and actions required to overcome such setbacks.

Keywords: Tourism Product, Rock-Cut Caves, SWOT Analysis, Potential, and Scope.

Introduction

Caves are not just the architectural feature but it is a means of knowing our past culture, history, lifestyle, thought process and practices of humans in the past as we all know humans show their creativity through their artwork which rises out of their brains are greatly influenced by their surroundings and imaginations. In addition to this, caves can also be a place of experiencing adventure, and being in close contact with nature these caves have great potential to attract educationists, scientific researchers, arts and historians, eco-tourism, and adventure tourists, hence it is multifaceted. But the irony is that as compared to other nations not much attention has been given to caves as a tourism product in India. For instance, we can refer to the case of Australia which is getting the maximum percentage of tourism through newly developed caves. This paper will discuss the action needed to promote and bring these caves on the tourism map so that these caves can be sold as a prominent tourism product in the global market. Caves being a good natural resource possess great potential for the development of tourism and can work as an efficient tool for the economic growth of the host community (Rindam, 2014). Rock cut caves and rock shelters are important for both archaeologists and the travel industry as for archeologists these are means to learn and avail knowledge about a past life or the life of early humans such as their art forms, religious beliefs, local practices, and so on. However, on the other hand, the travel industry uses it as a means or product through which tourists can experience nature-based tourism or eco-tourism and somewhere as adventure travel too. Knezevic and Zikovic (2011) asserted that caves supply knowledge about shape, architectural features, and built structure i.e morphological features which are very valuable in the tourism development of any site and are of great attraction for adventure tourists.

Objectives of the Study

- Identifying the reason why Udaygiri caves are playing as an underdog in the tourism market.
- Exploring the various dimensions of tourism at Udaygiri caves to promote it as a potential tourism product.
- Spreading awareness regarding the unique features of Udaygiri caves among domestic and international tourists.

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Study Area Background

The meaning of Uday is sunrise and Giri is a mountain so the combination means “the mountain of sunrise” probably in ancient times people of this region used to watch the sunrise through this mountain. Some historians have claimed that the iron pillar of Delhi was part of Udaygiri and if the same is true then one of the inscriptions on the pillar depicts this place as “Vishnupadgiri” where Vishnupad means God Vishnu’s foot or Vishnu’s footprint and Giri is a mountain. This inscription is from the 5th century CE. Udaygiri caves are one of the most beautiful and scenic groups of twenty rock-cut caves located near the capital of Central Indian state known as Madhya (Central) Pradesh (State) these caves are just at a run of 5-6 km from Vidisha and 10-12 km from Sanchi famous for its Buddhist Stupa which is also a UNESCO World Heritage site. Archaeologically, Udaygiri was started in the 3rd to 2nd century BCE but as per epigraphical records, these caves date back to the 4th – 5th century AD. The inscriptions found at this site are in a shell script or Brahmi script. While some other inscriptions are found in the Nagari script which belongs to the 11th century CE. There are in total 12 inscriptions found at this site that tell us about the socio-economic, religious, and cultural aspects of the society existing at the time of the Gupta empire. Some popular and highly valuable inscriptions are found in caves numbers 6, 7, 19, and 20. Here, out of twenty, only two caves belong to the Jain community remaining all belong to Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism. Some important inscriptions from the Gupta dynasty are found at the site which depicts that these caves belong to the reign of Chandra Gupta II and Kumar Gupta I from 375-455 CE. Because of its archeological features and morphology, it came under the patron of ASI to preserve it in a better manner and keep it maintained for visitors. Here, this paper aims to highlight the beauty of Udaygiri caves to develop the pull factor for tourists.

Cave 1 & 20 is of great importance as these are the only two caves from Udaygiri which belong to the Jain sect. Cave 1 is an exclusive example of Hindu temple architecture in its initial phase, a small difference is that this cave temple has a Jain Tirthankaras statue in the shrine. Whereas cave 20 is dedicated to Tirthankar Parsavnath consisting of several rooms. On the hand, the remaining caves are purely Hindu temples consisting of Hindu deities. As per the local vendors near the cave site the condition of the group of caves was very bad but once it came under the Archaeological Survey of India things changed a lot such as a boundary was constructed around the site to safeguard it from the intervention of such human elements.

Potential of Udaygiri Caves as Tourism Product of India

Ellora caves were ranked 8th out of 10 most popular centrally protected monuments for tourists in the year 2019-20. If Ellora caves can have such a positive impact on the tourism industry and the economy of India then why not the Udaygiri group of caves can be a potential tourism product for India and Madhya Pradesh too. If our cultural and heritage resources are properly harnessed could lead to a better development prospect for the nation’s GDP and local community development. If the doubt of some persists on the potential of caves as a prominent tourism product, then we can also look into the example of New Zealand which is getting immense benefit by putting Waitomo caves on their tourism map. Estimated, 500,000 tourists visit Waitomo caves every year from every corner of the world. This was made possible by the efforts of the New Zealand government and the collaboration of different stakeholders in this country. Even though the discussed caves are away from mainstream tourism they can pull thousands and lakhs of tourists every year. But here the matter of subject is the approach required to promote Udaygiri caves and other such caves which are away from the limelight of tourists.

This group of caves is located in a village famous as Udaygiri village surrounded by natural beauty and is a remote area, which can serve as a treat for nature lovers, trekkers, and explorers who are looking for non-crowded places. The architectural beauty in itself is eye-catching one who is inclined to observe the carving on rocks would not be able to leave the place soon as the intricacies on rocks are so fine and beautifully carved such as Amrit caves whose outer walls show the complete story of Amrit Manthan in its carvings. Moreover, this place can be a great attraction for those who are very much interested in the history of India as several inscriptions have been found here.

According to the study of Samuel et al. (2008) on the tourist segment in Korea, one segment they had discussed desires to physically experience the environment of caves, they had also discussed the characteristics of cave tourists and their motivation. Though Udaygiri is abundant in the scenic beauty but still fails to attract a good number of tourists every year. There are numerous reasons behind the fact why this place is playing as an underdog in the tourism market. One of the most prominent ones which I observed was the unawareness and the attitude of locals. This reminds me of a popular saying “A prophet is not honored in his own country.” The same thing goes here too as the local community is unaware of the worth of this site and how it can help them in the socio-economic development of the local

community. Apart from this, several setbacks need to be addressed strategically to support sustainable development. A SWOT analysis was performed based on the personal observation of the site and secondary sources of data available in the form of published articles, conference proceedings, magazines, blogs, the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board website, and many more.

SWOT Analysis of the Potential of Udaygiri Caves as a Tourism Product

This technique was developed in 1970 by Stanford, it is the acronym for S- Strengths, W- weaknesses, O- Opportunities, T- Threats. SWOT analysis is useful in identifying the internal and external factors that affect the performance of any industry so that the managing authorities would be able to understand the key issues to address and know their strengths and use them in a better manner to ensure future growth.

An illustration of the categorization of all four elements of SWOT Analysis has been mentioned in the below table

Table 1: Findings of SWOT Analysis on Udaygiri Caves

Strengths (s)	Weaknesses (w)
S1- Heritage and cultural significance S2- One of the best places for curious historians. S3- Easily accessible. S4- Under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India. S5- Archaeological significance. S6-Scientific values such as geography, ecology, geomorphology, speleology, etc	W1- Safety of visitors. W2- Lack of development at the site W3- Lack of basic amenities and facilities. W4- Accommodation not available near the site. W5- No guiding facility. W6- Small parking area.
Opportunities (o)	Threats (t)
O1- Great scope for generating new market. O2- Operational round the year. O3- Could bring new job opportunities for locals. O4- Could be a motivation for young entrepreneurs. O5- Can serve as a new product for the tourism industry of Madhya Pradesh. O6- Various other forms of tourism can also be developed here.	T1- Unawareness among locals. T2- Lack of promotion. T3- Low interest of investors. T4- Attitude of locals

The various strengths identified through this study can be used to build better strategic plans for the development and up-gradation of the site, These strengths are S1- Heritage and cultural significance, S2- One of the best places for curious historians, S3- easily accessible, S4- this site is under the protection of ASI, S5- this site has archaeological significance, S6- This site has great value for science perspective, this will also enable us to identify the target market segment or visitor segmentation. However, if we look into the opportunities part, O1- Great scope for generating new tourist market, O2- Operation round the year, O3- Could bring new job opportunities for locals, O4- Could be a motivation for young entrepreneurs, O5- Can serve as a new tourism product, O6- various other forms of tourism can also be developed here, this place has got many opportunities that can transform the appeal of this place and can result into a rise in tourist footfall round the year and better conservation and preservation plan of the ecosystem around the caves In addition to this we can develop some activity-based tourism events or camps which can act as a pull factor for tourists. But the irony here is that the locals of this place are not aware of the importance of these caves, especially for the well-being of their lives. So the weaknesses which have been identified in this study are W1- the safety of visitors (only two guards are watching the site), W2- lack of development at the site, W3- the absence of basic amenities and facilities such as no refreshment joints, W4- No accommodation available near the site one has to stay at Vidisha or Sanchi and can have an excursion to these caves, W5- No guiding facilities available, one has to read the details of the caves available as a stone engraved inscription in front of each respective cave. W6- The parking area is too small, only a few vehicles can be accommodated in the parking as it is too small to handle the huge tourist inflow. Apart from all the weaknesses, many threats work as a hurdle in the development and popularity of these caves such as T1- Unawareness among locals is the biggest weakness as well as a threat to these caves because they will not understand the value of this site, especially for their livelihood, they will not take a personal interest in the development of site and resources. T2- Lack of promotion, unless people will know about such a place how come they will plan to visit this place and on the name of promotion Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has a small article on their website else there is no active promotion campaign for this site. T3- due to lack of promotion investors are also not interested in investing their money and manpower in this place. T4- The attitude of locals is not cooperative towards the visitors moreover they do not take interest in keeping the environment clean and hygienic, a place with so much heritage significance has become a picnic spot and lover's point for the locals.

So here the market players need to focus on all four elements of SWOT analysis to develop an efficient strategy for these caves considering their promotion, conservation, and protection. To enhance the potential of Udaygiri caves as a tourism product, the aspects of weaknesses need to be eliminated, on the other hand, the elements of the strengths must be expanded considering the development of caves matching the international standards of cave management by involving researcher from the relevant field of archaeology, tourism management, environment, and science. These researches will enable us to identify the aspects which can add value to these caves, such as visitor management, carrying capacity, promotional and marketing strategy, and the requirement for necessary funds for the execution of the strategies and plans.

Conclusion

Through this study, we suggest the stakeholder and tourism board look into the promotion part so that domestic and international tourists would be aware of such places to visit. Along with that, there is a great need for a cave tourist circuit which is currently missing in Madhya Pradesh to popularize cave tourism in India and abroad. With this paper, it is believed to increase public awareness among the local community about the conservation and preservation of these caves as these can be a good resource for their future generation and can help in raising their standards of living. Community involvement in the development and maintenance of Udaygiri caves can also elevate job opportunities and source of earnings for the locals. Considering the post-COVID pandemic phase, people are also looking for natural and clean places and here their motive will be completely fulfilled.

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