

## PROSPECTS OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN MARWAR

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### ABSTRACT

*Tourism is an important revenue generator for many countries. Its potential in employment sector is huge besides it can be a game changer for reducing poverty in many areas where scope of tourism sector is largely untapped. Marwar is one region where greater progress can be achieved if policy focus is geared towards this direction. The theme of the article is reformative as many practical suggestions have been given. The deeper connect with the geography of the region alongside delineating its cultural glory has been attempted. If right focus is created on tourism sector in Marwar it can bring further prosperity in the region. These points have been elaborated with research proofs.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Employment, Reformative, Prosperity.*

### Introduction

The present progress of cultural tourism in Marwar is nowhere close to its actual potential. Land productivity and means of livelihood have always been comparatively less in this region. The tough geological feature and vast sand dunes have prospered a peculiar culture of its own since Medieval period. However, this uniqueness of the culture is now a boon for the tourism industry in Marwar.

Tourists arrival in Marwar is worse than Rajasthan as whole. The numerical data is comparatively quite less.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, only 6.98 % foreign tourists of Rajasthan reached to Ranakpur and 8.61 % reached Jodhpur. Besides only 1.51% of Indian tourists of Rajasthan reached to Ranakpur and merely 1.70% Indian tourists of Rajasthan reached to Jodhpur.<sup>2</sup>

The prime focus of this article is to analyse the reformative scope of cultural tourism in Marwar region. However, Marwar as a cultural unit is still exiting but the scope of tourism studies will certainly involve other cultural regions of Rajasthan as well. Today tourism policy is formed often at pan state level; therefore the scope of this article will inevitably cut across the tourism scenario of the state in general. Besides, basics of cultural tourism concept are a must to develop greater understanding of the issues of tourism in Marwar.

Culture and tourism are both interconnected organically and get sustenance from each other. Richness in cultural traits of any region creates potential for tourism activities and on the other hand, greater focus on tourism in any region will invariably involve the task of preservation of cultural traditions of the region. Cultural tourism encompasses a whole spectrum of socio-cultural manifestations associated with all aspects human living and their surroundings, transformed into tourism products. It entails a whole range of tourism activities related to Ethnic Tourism, Rural Tourism, Eco Tourism, Pilgrim Tourism etc. Indeed, cultural tourism is double edged sword as on the one hand, increasing demands of tourism led to conservation of assets, while on the other hand, inappropriate use of and commodification of some assets alongside increased visitations threatened the very survival of those assets. Hence sustainable use of assets is needed in the realm of cultural tourism.

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The cultural tourism scenario in Marwar region is laden with its peculiar problems which demands area specific solutions. We shall now focus on the solutions to the various ills affecting the full realisation of cultural tourism potential in Marwar.

### **Suggestions for Meeting the Challenges**

There is need to improve cultural tourism prospects through the means of research and its links with the tourism industry. This missing connect must be established. The work of the researches is to conceptualising the problems in cultural tourism and coming up with relevant solutions. Inter-linkages between academic institutions and tourism industry are the key. Their mutual cooperation and exchange must be institutionalised. The curriculum of Tourist Management Courses/Diplomas stresses upon the management theories, foreign trends, computer IT, software etc. while the original research in cultural history is totally missing. Tourism related academic institutions must encourage field visits and field projects among the students. Teams of students must be given field projects to identify new spots and sites of cultural tourism in the district and for this all sorts of financial and technical support must be provided to them.

The tourism field must be considered as a sound academic activity as well thereby ensuring various scholarships for the candidates. U.G.C may also enter into this academic field to encourage creative interest among the students in the field of tourism. The very notion that the tourism is mostly industry oriented must be dispelled by encouraging its academic side as well so that something new and innovative could be discovered, ascertained, proved and established through the means of research. There is need to explore new possibilities in some tourist sites of Marwar. Kayalana Lake in Jodhpur is surrounded with hills which provide us an opportunity to launch ropeway around it. It will not only ensure revenue but also employment to the local youth. But the bottom line is that the maintenance should be done effectively otherwise many such projects have been stopped because of poor maintenance.

Petro Tourism is a very novel concept in India and attempt is being made to identify Barmer and Jaisalmer region with this new concept. It can become a great strategy to market the tourism of the region under the brand of Petro Tourism. It essentially means that the very process of extraction of natural gas or oil from the deserts and the functioning of the mammoth machines can itself become the attraction for tourists.

In entire Marwar area, a lot of stepwells (bavadi) are located in a very scattered manner. Even, today they contribute towards water harvesting and reduce runoff water during rain. But they are a neglected lot today as water is supplied through modern channels. One such example is a chotikhatu stepwell in Nagaur district. It was constructed with great architectural skills but now it has been overshadowed by sand dunes. It has the potential of becoming a good tourist spot.

Like Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Nagaur, forts of Jalore, Kuchaman and Maroth may also attract big tourist traffic if these forts are properly maintained and linked with adequate facilities. Besides, Osian, Buchkala and Mandore (Jodhpur district), Goth-Manglod and Kekind (Nagaur district) and Bhinmal and Shiwada (Jalore district) may be developed as tourist attractions. There is Gupta era temple at Goth-Manglod and Kekind. Nothing has been done to explore this potential.

There are at least five government museums located at Mandore, Jodhpur and Pali (including Oriental research institute and Sangeet Natak Academy) in which hundreds of statues and architectural remains have been collected from Mandore, Osian, Kiradu, Ghatiyala, Juna, Salawas and Jalore. Stone sculptures, manuscripts, inscriptions, miniature paintings, terracotta, metallic objects, arms, coins, miscellaneous objects are also displayed. But nothing is available in the forms of films, documentary, animations, YouTube, videos, plays and other visual means. There is a need of doing so and making them available to national and international tourists.

Marwar region is very popular for its handicrafts like handmade Jewellery, Metal-Ware, Pottery, Stone Carving, Ivory Carving, Lacquered Work, Leather Craft, Mojaris, Carpets, Durries, Paintings, miniatures, Textile, Embroidery, Wooden Work etc. Private business houses and shops sell these articles at very high cost. No government shop or outlet is available to sell these articles at reasonable price. Efforts are required in this field also.

There are almost 15,000 HIV positive people in the region comprising Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jalore and Pali and prostitution is one of the reasons behind the increasing number of HIV patients. Besides traditional flesh trade, male prostitution is also increasing in the region. Female sex workers are active and also being trafficked to other parts of India and to Gulf countries. No Awareness programme or drive is run by local Police, administration and health agencies to these activities.

Animal population in Marwar is very high which has led to the prevalence of leather industry like mojari, saddle in the belt of Jalore, Barmer etc. Such products can be popularised in European countries so that the export potential of such traditional products can be explored. It will certainly make the local youth and traditional community engaged in this sector prosperous.

Animal fairs mainly attract local folks for exchanging and buying animals for agriculture and other purposes. Big animal fairs at Nagaur, Tilwara (Barmer) etc must be geared towards attracting foreign tourists. The very sight of thousands of camels, oxes, bulls, horses besides the rural folk in their traditional attires are enough to appeal to the cultural curiosity of the tourists. In addition to it, the camel riding and horse riding is fairly popular among the tourists. The need is to setup tourist infrastructure around the site like luxurious tents which can accommodate a large number of tourists. Such activity will also be a part of village tourism. Another way to improve the prospects of cultural tourism in Marwar is to improve the air connectivity. The airports are at very few places at Marwar even among them few are air force operated which restricts the scope for civilian flights. In the west, airports have been set up even in small cities. In countries like Singapore, Thailand foreign exchange counters have been set up at every nook and corner.

As per statistics of tourists' arrival at Jaisalmer, Ranakpur and Jodhpur portrayed that the flow of tourists was relatively less at Jaisalmer compared to other two cities. Despite the prevalence of great cultural assets in Jaisalmer the comparative low tourist's arrival indicates the problem of its remote location. In addition to this, air connectivity to Jaisalmer is not operational. Even in case of Jodhpur the frequency of the air flights is less. Therefore, opening air ports at Barmer, Jaisalmer, Jalore will certainly improve the arrival of tourists.

Today we are living in a very advanced social media crazy world where the Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, websites form the core creative human activity! Therefore, mobile application for the benefit of foreign and domestic tourist alike can be developed by the tourism department. It will facilitate easy and convenient access to crucial information on real time basis. This information may be pertained to weather, any sudden law and order problem, destinations, routes etc. Such information can also be disseminated through WhatsApp. The game of commission and touts has become a big menace which is destroying the very soul of cultural tourism in Marwar or elsewhere. Right from the arrival of tourists at airport the network of commission exacting agents start its work of cheating the tourists. Often tourist are sold handicraft items at exorbitant rate and in the main market two rates prevails one for Indians and other for foreigners. Therefore, strict action should be taken against the touts.

There is lack of gender sensitivity among tourists guides besides dearth of female guides in Marwar. Tourist guides play a big role in the development of tourist industry so proper education and training the culture of the foreign tourists along with their commitment to the norms of their profession is needed. The financial constrain is the biggest hurdle in realising the actual potential of cultural tourism in Marwar. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is understaffed and marred by fund constrains which enable it to repair and conserve only prominent sites while the vast network of small monuments, forts, temples, chattris etc remains neglected. The lack of civil engineers for the task of conservation and repair of the monuments is the area where a policy framework is needed.

In Marwar, the Disney land of Europe and Las Vegas of U.S. cannot be developed but this land is thriving on its cultural tourism potential. Therefore, newer possibilities of deriving cultural attractions from the repository of cultural assets must be explored.

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