



RURAL HERITAGE TOURIST SPOTS OF JAMMU: BARRIERS AND GATEWAYS

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Abstract

The cultural identity of a place is observed in its heritage spots. Jammu and Kashmir has a rich and unique culture and attracts people from different states and countries. Kashmir is famous for its lakes and gardens whereas Jammu is preferred for its temples. Jammu's culture is quite different from Kashmir's and its heritage spots tell the history of Jammu's faith and love for nature. Around 1.36 crore tourists (Daily Excelsior) visited the Jammu region in 2019 when the situation in Kashmir was not favourable. The rising interest of people to explore Jammu gives the opportunity to promote its historical and cultural legacy. Heritage tourist spots have a social and economic impact and help in building the destination image. This study is an attempt to identify the pertinent heritage spots of the Udhampur region of Jammu and to find the reasons for lesser visits to these spots. Krimchi Temple, Sudhmahadev Temple, and Ramnagar Fort have been selected for this study because of their representation of the region's culture, faith, and tradition. The results of the study may help the locals and the tourism department to develop these destinations with an attractive image to attract more tourists.

Keywords: Instagram, Infrastructure, Holydazzle, Rural tourism, Social media, Tourists

Introduction

The tourism industry is ranked as the second-highest revenue industry after the oil industry. The tourism sector makes a huge contribution to the local economy, generates employment, and contributes to sustainable development. India is one of the leading tourist destinations in the world with 1.24 percent of the world's international tourist arrivals in 2019 (Economic Times, 2020). India has been ranked 34 in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of the World Economic Forum, rising from 65 ranks in 2013 (LiveMint, 2020). Tourism is growing worldwide and there is a significant shift from 'mass tourism' to 'alternative' form of tourism. With attractive opportunities in the form of niche tourism products, India has the advantage to grow in the tourism sector. To harness the potential of the tourism industry theme-based tourist circuits and Swadesh Darshan campaigns have been launched by the Indian government. The department of tourism of the J&K government is preparing the tourism policy to develop and promote Sufi Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, and Shiva Circuit with a focus on religious and heritage tourism. People have the inherent curiosity to explore the cultural heritage of different regions and this motivation of tourists makes the heritage spots of a region the prized assets. The new generations learn about the natural history, cultures, traditions, faith, and values that are represented by these heritage spots. Udhampur region of Jammu has many sites for religious and heritage tourism. The villages around these sites can be developed as rural tourist villages for the development of the region. The local communities can be developed socially and economically by showcasing the rural life, art, culture, and heritage of Udhampur. Different destinations have different stories and the local communities have the knowledge from generations which keeps the sacred originality of the destination intact.

Relationship between Heritage tourism and Rural development

The rural villages can utilize cultural heritage spots for social and economic development when a strong linkage is established between tourism and the local community. The sustainable rural development is achieved as there is a boom of domestic and foreign tourists exploring the cultural heritage. The improvement of the quality of life of local people is also ensured with tourism development (Bachleitnera and Zinsb, 1999). In the last few years, heritage tourism has been promoted by the Indian government to build the destination image of India. The marginal rural areas can be developed if tourism to their heritage spots flourishes. The heritage management by rural local communities will support the government initiatives also to promote tourism. The preservation of cultural heritage also motivates the people to visit the region along with sight-seeing.

The 'counter urbanization' syndrome is one of the main reasons for people to visit rural tourist spots. When people get the opportunity to explore heritage spots like temples and forts in these rural villages then their preference for that particular region increases. The value of heritage tourism in the region's sustainable growth and the development of rural villages in Jammu have to be acknowledged. The preference of tourists for heritage spots is also ascertained by activities carried out by the rural local communities which preserve and disseminate the cultural values. Therefore, heritage tourism and rural development are closely linked to one another.

Challenges in Rural Heritage Tourism

The available articles and information uncovered the issues which are responsible for less interest of people to visit the rural heritage spots. But heritage management by the local communities is the basic requirements and the following challenges hinder the likeability of rural heritage spots:

- **Lack of basic education:**
According to MHRD's 2018 Educational Statistics report (NDTV, 2019), the overall literacy rate in Rural India is 64.7 %. In rural India, the literacy rate among women is 56.8 %, and for men, 72.3 %. Illiteracy hampers the readiness of local people to interact with tourists.
- **Lack of Trained Manpower:**
People in these rural villages are not ready to learn the required skills which will help them to support tourists by providing them with the required services. There is no liaison with the tourism department also to train and learn.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:**
Many tourists complain about the lack of proper physical infrastructure in rural areas. Many villages in the country don't have proper roads. There is a need to construct and maintain all-weather roads so that tourist can visit the spots without any hindrance, also provide safety and security, road signs, and arrange safe drinking water.
- **Trained Tourist Guide:**
In rural tourism, trained tourist guides are not available. Tourist guide plays a crucial task in describing the cultural heritage of the destination and when the guide is from the local community who can communicate and conduct the visit then the tourists will be more convinced and delighted.

Communication Skills:

Communication is also a major issue in rural tourism. language problem will be again a challenge for the tourism department. one must have the basic knowledge of the local language in rural tourism, Hindi and English are the most used language in the country but in the rural areas local communities prefer to talk in their language, so trained guide who knows more than 2 languages will able to communicate with tourists effectively.

Benefits of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is one of the important sectors that make a valuable contribution to rural economies. Rural tourism contribution is substantial in rural development. Some of the potential benefits are:

Job retention:

Rural tourism will help to maintain employment in such sectors as shopping, transportation, hospitality, and medical care. Job retention also provides income for farmers, fishermen, and foresters. It can also help local artisans.

New business opportunities:

The new business opportunities are seen in sectors like hospitality, food and beverages, recreational, organic farming, and local arts and crafts.

Job Creation:

The flow of tourists also generates employment as tourists need food, hotels to stay, vehicles to commute, and other essential and medical facilities. The requirement of these services creates opportunities for the locals and they can earn by staying in their villages.

Review of literature:

The available literature has been discussed in this section.

McCain and Ray (2003) emphasize on the importance of identifying the segment of tourists who have interest in heritage travel and the tourist managers should connect this segment with the options of different heritage spots.

Dimitrovski et al. (2011) discussed the potential of rural tourism in terms of its culture, historic monuments, and clean natural surroundings. The economic despair of the region can be eliminated by promoting rural spots. Rural households can benefit when more tourists visit their regions.

A study by **Dogra et al. (2012)** found various barriers related to Sudhmahadev temple-like relatively large social engagement costs, poor people's limited ability and underdeveloped areas, and lack of proper infrastructure. So government authorities and local communities need to play a significant role in the development of tourist spots.

Kadi et al. (2014) reviewed the available literature on rural heritage tourism destinations and discussed the need of practice orientation in studies which may help the tourism industry to cope with dynamic issues of tourist destinations.

Dhawan R. (2015) related rural tourism with rural growth. The author has emphasized on long term sustainable growth by preserving the surrounding environment and rich cultural heritage.

Ramjit (2015) identified a lack of infrastructure, illiteracy, underdeveloped spots, lack of information, and understanding as to the challenges to tourism development. He has also discussed that the majority of people are often unaware of the existence of tourist places. Rural tourism emerged as beneficial for poverty alleviation, employment generation, and development of remote areas. The government should promote rural tourism for eliminating the various challenges for the development of natural tourist destinations.

Rani et al. (2018) in their study analyzed that the development of the tourism destinations has given a boost to the employment generation in J&K. Among all north Indian states, J&K is the most preferred destination places with its unique and beautiful topography, rare and special species of forest and wildlife, and rich art and heritage. As the tourists want to explore the new spots so there is a scope for the Jammu region to develop its underdeveloped/less explored spots. This will generate direct employment and revenues in the remote regions of the state.

Chiao et al. (2018) have emphasized on technology innovation to generate attractive tourist experiences. They constructed a virtual reality tour-guiding platform and promoted the cultural tourism. The effectiveness of the model has also been discussed in their study which emphasizes on human-online interaction for good tour experience.

Objectives:

1. To identify the barriers to visit the rural heritage tourist spots.
2. To explore the ways of generating awareness among tourists to visit these spots.

Scope of the Research:

The results of this study can help practitioners in understanding the specific problems of rural heritage spots. The financial support from the government and collaboration of local communities can help in the sustainable development of these spots and rural areas.

Research methodology:

A questionnaire was designed to collect the information regarding the three identified rural heritage spots: Krimchi temples, Sudhmahadev temple, and Ramnagar fort. The objective was to find the reasons for people's less interest in visiting these spots and the impact of social media in influencing them.

Secondary data have also been collected from various books, journals, the tourism department of Jammu and Kashmir, and other online resources.

Research Design

Survey Method: A sample of 80 respondents was contacted. The questionnaire was personally administered to the respondents.

Experimental Method: To generate awareness about Krimchi temple, Sudhmahadev temple and Ramnagar fort, Facebook page, and the Instagram page have been developed to describe these spots and attract the people with beautiful pictures, videos, and tourist reviews. The motivation for this experiment has been inculcated from the study of Chia et al. (2018).

Data Analysis:

table 1 demographic profile of the respondents

		Total
Gender	Male	65
	Female	15
Age	18-25	48
	26-35	25
	36-50	07
Education	Graduate	46
	Post Graduate	29
	Doctorate	05
Occupation	Student	43
	Govt. Employee	11
	Business	10
	Pvt. Employee	16

Interpretation: From the above data, it is evident that most of the respondents are in the age between 18-25 years i.e. 48 respondents, so many young respondents are shouldering the research whereas 65 of the respondents were male and out of 80, 43 of them are students and 16 of them are working as private employees whereas 46 of the respondents pursuing graduation and 29 of the respondents pursuing post-graduation.

table 2 general questions regarding rural heritage tourist spot

		Total
Do you know about krimchi temple (pandav mandir)?	Yes	60
	No	20
Do you know about Sudhmahadev Temple ?	Yes	67
	No	13
If Yes, then from where you get to know about Sudhmahadev temple ?	Friends	10
	Family	13
	Social media	44
Do you know about Ramnagar Fort?	Yes	51
	No	29
Do you use social media?	Yes	59
	No	21
Overall do you consider social media helped you to explore the unexplored heritage tourist spots.	Yes	47
	No	33
Does innovative content and unique presentation on social media pages ignite an interest in you to travel and explore?	Yes	46
	No	34

Generating Awareness via Social Media

After talking with the respondents it was discovered that they did not find any useful social media page related to these less explored tourist spots. Also, the J&K tourism department is not promoting these spots, and footfall to these particular spots is very less as compared to highly promoted tourist spots of J&K. Usually, tourists prefer to go for the urban or known destination and rural tourism is left behind and the percentage of rural tourism visits is very less. So the initiative has been taken via social media: Instagram and Facebook for promotion of these less explored tourist spots of Udhampur. All three destinations have different stories and heritage. These destinations come under underdeveloped areas and there are many barriers related to these spots because of this, these spots are less explored and are part of heritage sites. A social media page with the name of **Holydazzle** has been created and there are 43 followers on this Instagram page and 50 people are following the Facebook page. The Youtube channel can also be created with live videos and this can be done after this COVID-19 pandemic is over. This initiative can help the tourism department and local communities to generate awareness for not only the heritage monuments but also by sharing the historical stories, by advertising the local cuisines, art and craft and promoting the scenic beauty of these areas. As the tourism industry has suffered the most during the COVID-19 pandemic so there is a need to develop such social media pages and channels which can provide 'virtual tours' of rural heritage spots. These virtual tours can give the visual experience which may engage the viewers and generate interest.

The three rural heritage spots which have been described on Facebook page and Instagram page 'Holydazzle' (Pic. 1) are Krimchi temples, Sudhmahadev temple and Ramnagar fort.

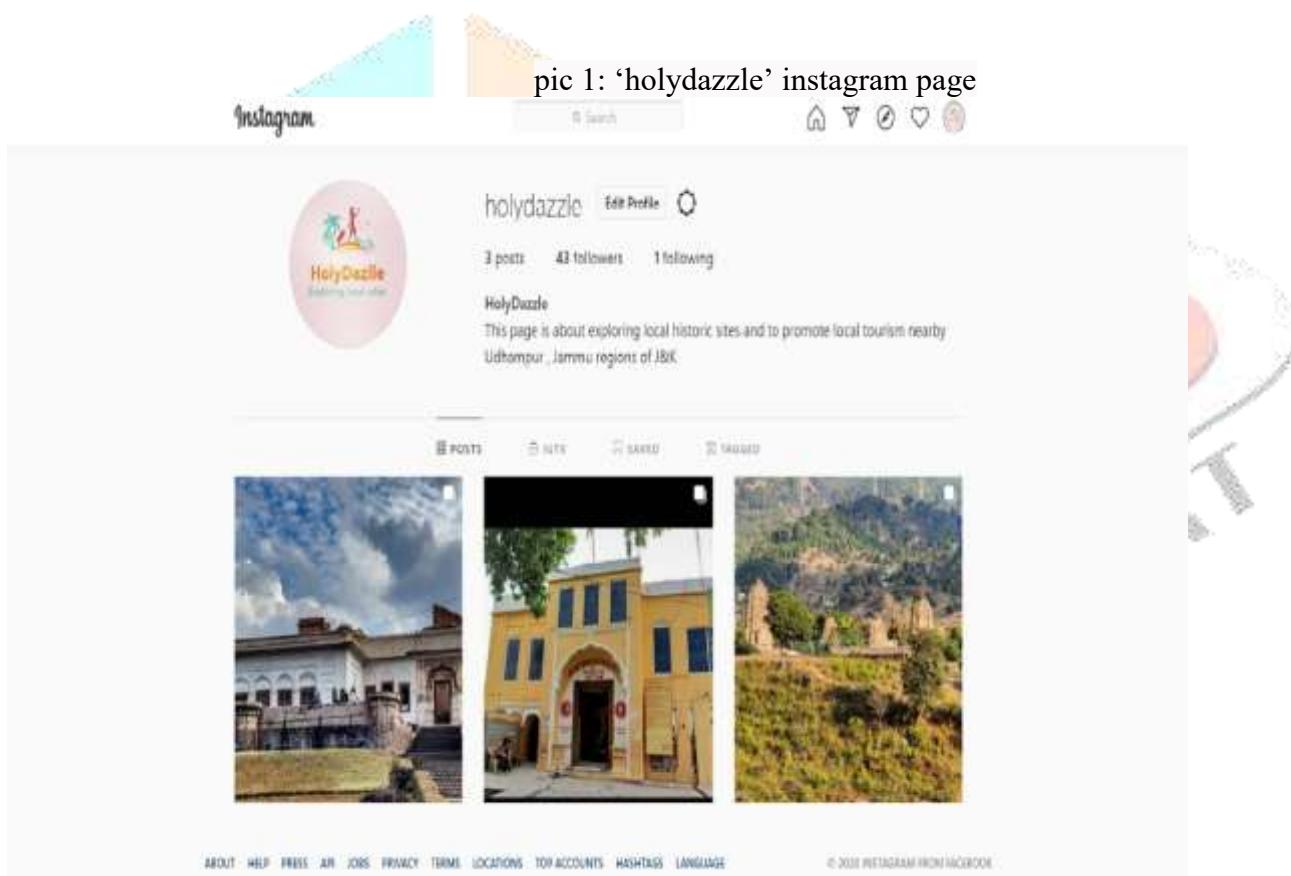


table 3: barriers of rural heritage tourist spot

		Total
I know about krimchi temple but haven't visited there because:	Lack of transportation	2
	Unavailability of information	8
	Lack of interest	16
	Poor maintenance	17
	Remote area	7
I know about Ramnagar Fort but haven't visited there because:	Lack of transportation	17
	Unavailability of information	1
	Lack of interest	3
	Poor maintenance	1
	Remote area	22

Krimchi temples



Krimchi temples, one of the oldest temples and manmade historical monuments at village Krimchi in Udhampur town were constructed in 8th - 9th century AD. They are situated on the bank of stream Birunala, also known as Pandava temples and they resemble Baij Nath and Linga Raja temple at Bhubaneshwar in Orissa. There are four large and three small temples and were constructed by Raja Kichak. These temples are one of the oldest temples in Jammu & Kashmir and situated in the stone complex. These temples exhibit Hellenistic features (Indo-Greek influence). The tourists can also visit the nearby village Pancheri to enjoy the cool scenic beauty. A visit to Krimchi temples and Pancheri village can enthrall the visitors with its natural beauty, rich heritage and interesting story.

Sudhmahadev Temple:



Sudhmahadev temple is 120 km away from Jammu city. It is managed by the Dharmarth Trust of J&K. It is believed that Goddess Parvati had herself worshipped Lord Shiva in this temple. Gouri Kund - the holy spring, Maantalai – Marriage spot of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati and Devka – the holy river are the main attractions. The Trishul (Trident) kept in temple premises is believed to be of Lord Shiva and the demon Sudh was killed by this Trishul. The pandits of the temple can tell you the interesting stories which inculcate faith and good values.

Ramnagar Fort:



Historic Ramnagar Fort is a protected monument which was taken over by the Indian Archeological Survey in 1972. It was built by Raja Suchet Singh. The main attractions of this spot are mural paintings, sheesh mahal and Maharani's samadhi.

Findings

1. From the study, it has been found that majority of the respondents known about krimchi temple but haven't visited there because of poor maintenance of tourist spots.
2. Social Media is the most preferred tool by the respondents to search for Sudhmahadev temple.
3. The majority of the respondents know about Ramnagar fort but haven't visited because of the remote area and lack of proper transportation facilities.
4. 59 respondents which constitute about 74% of the total population, use social media, So the reach of social media is maximum and can be used effectively regarding unexplored heritage spots.
5. Different barriers have been found for both Ramanagar Fort and Krimchi Temple.
6. 57.5% of respondents opted that innovative content and unique presentation on social media pages ignite an interest to travel and explore the heritage spots.
7. 60 respondents opted that they know about krimchi temple and out of which, 59 says that social media help them to explore for heritage tourist spots.
8. Online resources for heritage spot i.e krimchi temple is not sufficient to create interest for the travelers and tourist but the online resources with complete information are not available
9. 32% of the total respondents say that because of the lack of local community participation and government intervention creates a lack of interest for the visitors to visit the heritage tourist spot.

Managerial Implication:

Heritage destinations have historical implications. The new generations learn about the natural history, cultures, traditions, faith, and values that are represented by these heritage spots. The rural communities preserve the heritage but there is a need to emphasize the ways to promote these temples and fort in the Udhampur region. The support of the government and the collaborative efforts of the locals can help in eliminating the identified barriers. When more tourists will visit these spots there will be economic development of the area around, which will help further in spending on preserving the heritage of the region. Tourists are attracted to rural destinations as they want to relax and enjoy by being away from fast city life and these destinations offer them the natural scenic wealth and historical legacy. The readiness to visit any destination depends on the awareness, reviews, and reference by friends and relatives. Therefore, the way these three spots have been described and presented as a part of this study can be considered by the concerned authorities to promote and develop the heritage destinations of less explored Udhampur's region of Jammu.

Limitations:

1. Data could be collected from 80 respondents only as there was a reluctance to participate in the survey.
2. Due to pandemic, the planned Youtube channel could not be created as it required virtual tours of these three spots.
3. Because of sparse time and resources, a detailed survey could not be conducted.

Suggestion:

1. Future researchers should take a larger sample size which helps the concerning authorities to make a better decision.
2. Concerned tourism department should be contacted to understand the problems which hinder the development of heritage spots.
3. The tourists visiting the spots should be surveyed for the actual problems they face in reaching there and also the desired expectations from the destination have been fulfilled or not.
4. More barriers to rural heritage spots can be included for a detailed study.
5. Social media has a very important role to play in promoting rural heritage spots. Therefore, usage of this medium to generate awareness, collect reviews and most importantly organizing live virtual tours especially in this COVID-19 pandemic phase will keep the tourists amused.

Conclusion:

This study contributed to the segment that loves to travel heritage tourist spots. But various barriers hinder the growth of a particular heritage spot. In the case of Krimchi temples, poor maintenance is the major barrier because of which they don't prefer to visit there. Whereas it has been identified that social media acts as the best platform for the awareness and promotion of Sudhmahadev temple. So the tourism department can use the social media platform for better reach. The government needs to focus on Ramnagar Fort by providing a proper transportation facility which acts as a major barrier for the development of the heritage spot. Heritage management is not the task of government only, the locals have to be educated and trained to preserve the legacy in the form of these rural heritage spots.

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