
BUILT HERITAGE IN SMALL TOWNS A UNIQUE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY: CASE OF SHIV KUND, SOHNA

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The small and medium towns of our country are abundantly rich in built heritage with varied value and significance for a wide range of stakeholders. While the established tourist destinations attract visitation, the heritage that thrives in most of our small towns represents a lost opportunity. Popular tourist destinations in the country deal with visitor numbers beyond their carrying capacities, resulting in adverse effects for the local communities. A focus on the smaller towns would allow both domestic as well as international visitors to experience the unique value that they present, leveraging the interest of those who are on the lookout for more dynamic and diverse experiences. Shiv Kund in Sohna is an example of a site that has all the credentials to attract a wider range and numbers of tourists or visitors. The case establishes that the rich built heritage, strong stakeholder connect and value of such sites in our country represents a lost opportunity for a nation that is trying to build itself as a tourist destination. The takeaways for professionals, students and those in government can be significant.

INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that India is largely a heritage tourism destination. There has been a lot of conversation how with investments in its infrastructure and services (tourism related), the number of international tourists visiting in India can be grown to a more acceptable and representative number. It is true that our 1.2% share of the international traveller pie is rather dismal when compared to the likes of France, UK, Germany and many other nations. Governments have consistently identified tourism as a driver of economic growth and promised steps to support the tourism related ecosystem at large with an eye on the high spending international traveller. The fact that inbound traveller statistics (international travellers) have little to show is question for the government and policy makers to consider, if not answer.

The other interesting and again rather well known trend with respect to tourism in India is the fact that it is largely driven by a massive domestic market, with nearly 400 million Indians traveling across the country for leisure, religious pilgrimage, adventure travel etc, the domestic traveller is thus in prominence. A growing middle class, with disposable income and willingness to travel for a range of reasons has emerged as the key driver our tourism related economic activity in the country.