

Heritage Tourism in Information Age: Need of Historians' Active Participation

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ABSTRACT

Heritage Tourism is gaining tremendous ground in India and is an important aspect of Tourism, which affects the historic and cultural portrayal of this country. Due to the information technology revolution, there is an explosion of information for heritage tourists. The information thus available easily and freely appears good enough to cater to any serious heritage traveler. Or does it really? The current trends of information collation, aggregation and retrieval seem to create a problem of plenty of mostly generic and distributed information. The gap of qualitative information on Heritage places and authentic and authoritative representation of culture needs the historian to play a greater role and take a more positive and active part.

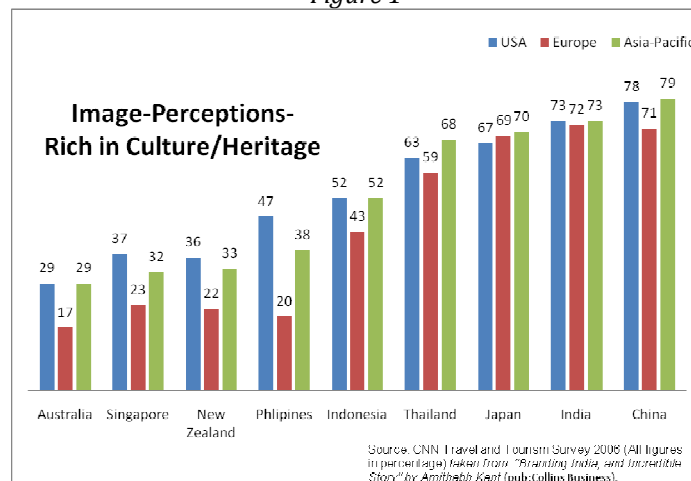
KEYWORDS: *Heritage Tourism, Technology, GPS, Search Engines, Historians*

INTRODUCTION

With growing economy, Tourism is one of the biggest phenomena that world is seeing today. In a culturally rich country like India, Heritage Tourism is one of the significant commodities and a great marketing tool that has the power to influence all other forms of tourism. India, from time immemorial is a land of deep rooted history and heritage, reflecting sagas of emotions like love, betrayal, joy and sorrow all woven in the monuments of time, which are in true sense footprints of our culture. Though they cannot speak, every brick and stone will narrate a story of its own in the language of silence and reveal that there existed a glorious civilization. Throughout the length and breadth of India, monuments are dotted, which portray the ideas, ideals, emotions, sensations - all conceived by the patrons and executed by the artists. As tangible heritage, they occupy a unique place and represent eternal embodiments of aesthetic and artistic excellence as also the spirit and cultural values of the age. This legacy is the essence of heritage tourism.

Heritage Tourism is defined as "travel undertaken to explore and experience the places, activities and artifacts that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present". It is a branch of Tourism oriented towards cultural heritage. It envisages travel for purpose of widening one's knowledge, understand and appreciate art, architecture and heritage, which are hereditary treasures. Historic, artistic and cultural heritage is important products of Tourism. India with its pluralistic culture, which it has adapted and adopted due to outside influences and regional variety, is an ideal destination of Heritage Tourism with full of surprising heritage packages. Splendorous temples, majestic forts, whispering palaces, pleasure gardens, mosques, mausoleums, domes, minarets, *darbar* halls, *basadis*, *Viharas*, museums, art galleries, structured environments, urban and rural sites which were cradles of civilizations, actual locations where historic events occurred, places of unique living cultures- all become products of Heritage Tourism.

Figure 1



Heritage Tourism envisages understanding and appreciating the past. It re-enforces cultural identity, establishes connectivity with the past, facilitates harmony and understanding among people and helps to renew tourism. It also leads to the identification, management and protection of cultural values. It is a significant element in the portrayal Indian people and their culture both internally and to the external world. Figure 1 shows the image of Indian Heritage in the eyes of external world. An aspect of this magnitude thus requires to be handled with utmost care, delicacy and respect.

From time immemorial visits to places of worship has been the mainstay in the Indian ethos. Though the term 'Heritage Tourism' was not in vogue, Indians have always travelled and appreciated arts. In modern times, due to increasing access to information through media and easier means of transport, Tourism as a separate leisure and learning activity is picking tremendous ground. Increasingly the youth of the country, especially in urban areas are keen to know about themselves as a collective people, a country and other aspects which hold together in lieu of such diversity of geography and languages. It is important that the domestic tourists all well equipped with the history and information on heritage so as to feel a sense of pride when they go visiting places.

To help explore the heritage sites different tools and means have been put to use, mainly print and electronic media. Brochures, audio guides, labels, artworks, electronic boards, heritage walks, multimedia guides, human guides and curators are the ones which are in common use at the disposal of the heritage traveler. Rarely has the purpose of a wholesome experience for tourist been served with the above said tools. Taking the example of a human guide, we often find that the guide is unable to portray the historical drama of a place, and fail to provide a holistic view and is seen to stress more on the dramatized version of the myths connected. The vocation of a guide has not been a sought after one and often we find that the mouthpieces of our heritage monuments are without the required educational qualification or a genuine affinity towards history or heritage.

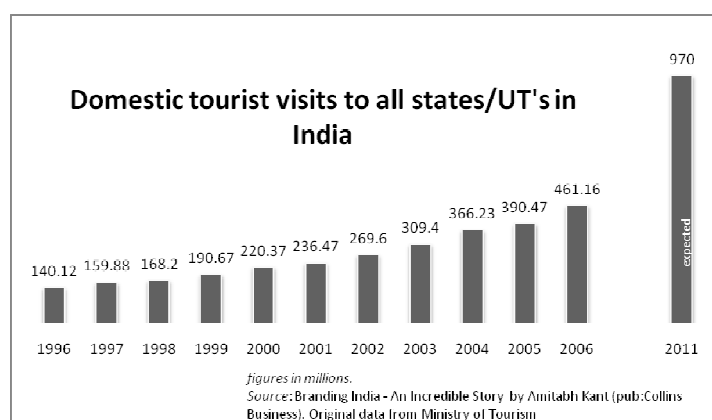
Brochures are another means of engaging an inquisitive traveler. While the brochures do convey some basic information like historical overview and can do due justice in providing local information relating to stay and hospitality, they lack in creating the drama about the place and conveying the essence of the place. For a large part, tour books have been the close companions of an aware and inquisitive traveler. While the tour books definitely serve the purpose of getting the tourist to the place, suggest places for stay and things to do, often for a large country like India, the pages are utterly insufficient to portray the essence of the place.

It is also impractical on the tourist part to spend time reading on the location for hours, while he could indulge in the visual pleasure of exploring them at the same time. Some notable exceptions to this trend where the guidebooks do provide a wealth of material in simplified and easily understandable format are the World Heritage Series guidebooks published by the Archeological Survey of India^{1,2}.

A very popular tourist book has about little more than a quarter of a page describing the history of as great and majestic a place as Hampi³.

In modern times, often the most sought after source of information by the traveler is the internet. Internet is ubiquitous in today's urban world. The rural IT and communication patterns seem indicate that the internet usage is getting more prevalent in the daily lives. Increasing affordability of devices like laptops, computers, mobile phones, and falling prices, thanks to advancing technology and increasing market base have increasingly made the layman and heritage tourist inch more and more closely toward the internet independent of place and time.

Figure 2

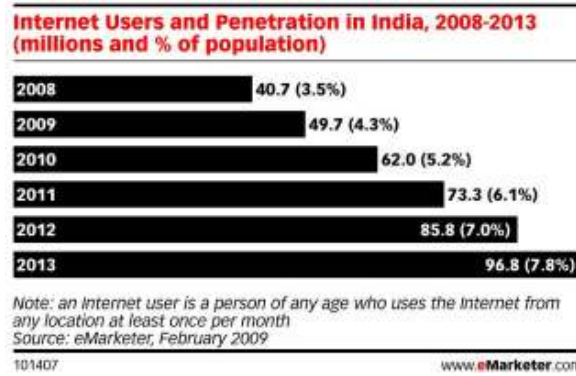


With increasing usage of internet by people at large, and the fact that the time an average person spends on the internet also increasing, newer forms of information collection, retrieval and sharing have emerged. Portals like flickr®, Picasa® make sharing photos with friends and family a breeze, the trend of blogging has enabled people to share their views and made individual publication a thing that is taken for granted. Concepts like Twitters are gaining ground for their uniqueness in sharing short messages, bringing more people in touch with each other. Search engines are the greatest contributors to the information revolution, being able to get the relevant information on the click of a button.

Urban Indians seem to use the internet for most of the information gathering. As early as 1996, according to a survey by the California-based Computer Industry Almanac, India has been ranked 19th in a worldwide survey of computer usage⁴.

In the context of tourism, one often finds that quantitatively there is a huge cache of material put up on the internet in form of travelogues, photographs, experiences, and accounts of the individuals' understanding of history. The information, some of which is a result of a collective effort by the internet users often lacks authenticity and authority. Advent of newer technologies like GPS, 3G networks, smarter mobile phones is changing this information scene in making newer patterns emerge. Location based information retrieval and availability of internet connectivity independent of time and place are only adding to the traveler's woes by creating a problem of plenty, with mostly generic information.

Figure 3



One tends to look for this information, as most of it is free. While the tools like GPS and maps do help in general travel and finding directions to hotels and places of interest, the ultimate goal of the traveler – to learn about the place and its history and have a experience is still big hole which the internet till now is not able to fill. For example, an internet search through a popular search engine on “Hampi”, a world heritage site in South India gives the following results⁵ as in Figure 4. One can see that the general searches mostly lead to a lot of generic info which in most cases is really not useful for a serious Heritage traveler. In most cases the number of words on these sites on Heritage and History is sub 500 on average. Focus seems to be more on sharing personal experiences, sharing photos and information on places to stay.

Figure 4 Search Engine results on “Hampi”

Title	weblink	Focus	No. of words on History and Heritage	Compilation type	Possibility of Historian participation
Where To Stay At Hampi?	Hampigh.blogspot.com	sponsored link for a private guest house	~0	private	No
HAMPI in India : Every detail you need on Hampi	www.hampi.in	Ameteur info collection(ref: "This website is an amateur attempt by us to share some info on ")	128	individual	no
Hampi (Humpi)	www.hampi.in/hampi.htm	places to visit, Ameteur info collection	1500	individual	no
Hampi - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hampi	General Information	~900	collaborative	ver little
Hampi Word Heritage Site Vijaynagar Lotus Mahal Hampi	www.karnataka.com/tourism/hampi	Cursoy information	~900	government sponsored	very little
Hampi: Pictures & Photos	amitkulkarni.info/pics/hampi/ -	focus on personal photos	~100	individual	no
Hampi, Karnataka, India, World Heritage Site, Capital of Vijayanagara	www.hampionline.com/	focus on photos, personal	~500	individual	no
Hampi travel guide - Wikitravel	wikitravel.org/en/Hampi	dos and donts, travel info	~50	collaborative	no
Group of Monuments at Hampi - UNESCO World Heritage Centre	whc.unesco.org/en/list/241	oofficial website of unesco	~0	official	No
Hampi travel guide	www.world66.com/asia/southasia/india/karnataka/hampi	comercial site	~50	collaborative	no
Kaladarshana - Indian Art-History - Hampi	www.kaladarshana.com/sites/hampi/	photos	~50	individual	no

WHY HISTORIANS ROLE IS IMPORTANT

Quality and authenticity, which are the essential ingredients of Heritage Tourism, can be accomplished through active participation of historians. They can be best links between monuments and serious and genuine tourists and can provide first hand authentic information by illustrative media based on their expertise and experience. In the context of Heritage Tourism, historians can be mission-based communicators who can be related at intellectual and emotional levels by the tourist. This will inspire and motivate the tourist, which can lead to wider and better understanding of spirit and content of the place.

WHAT ROLE HISTORIANS SHOULD PLAY?

Articles and writings aimed towards general readers and heritage tourists giving the broad spectrum of the heritage sites can go a long way in establishing a relationship between a historian and the reader or traveler. A historian is the right person who can describe etymology, geography, culture, architecture, attire and general portrayal of the society, local ballads thus bringing about the full heritage splendor and connect the historical aspects with the contemporary times thus enabling the traveler to not only understand the finer elements of the place's and the people's ethos, but also thus enabling them to blend with the place. Historians who have done considerable work on the sites can play a larger role thus making names synonymous with the heritage site in the minds of the traveler. For example, the name of Dr. S R Rao is considered inseparable with Dwaraka⁶ not only due to his marine excavation, which brought to light ancient Dwaraka, but also due to the fact that he has written extensively keeping in mind the general reader connecting the aspects of mythology to the excruciating details of historical research, thus making a bond with the very fiber of a pilgrim, a heritage traveler and a serious history reader. A travel to Dwaraka without knowing about the work of Dr S R Rao is not only an injustice to the heritage of the place, but also depriving a traveler a genuine experience. Likewise, work of James Todd⁷ is inseparable with Rajasthan because of his writing for general readership, and Meadows Taylor⁸ likewise for South Central India. Dr. A. Sundara's booklet on Pattadakal¹ is another example of a wealth of Academic Research put in lucid words which go very well with the lay reader. Some historians who have contributed to the Heritage Tourism with their writings are George Mitchell⁹ (various books on Hampi), C. Sivaramamurthy² (booklets on Mahabalipuram) and Dr. Sheelakanth Pattar^{10,11} who has graphically illustrated the times and culture of the Badami and Chalukyan Dynasty which is eminently readable by the general Heritage Tourists. He has been able to give a holistic view of the Capital of Chalukyas and the times and lives in 6th century by carefully analyzing the layers of cultural aspects of Badami and its environs.

FACILITATION OF HISTORIANS: ROLE PLAY

The historian needs to use the same tools which have hitherto been used for the popularization of heritage sites, but with a greater amount of direct participation and with the heritage traveler as the target audience. The amount of historical research is not found wanting but this rarely reaches the lay traveler in the form and way that he wants. An effort on the historians' part can, not only promote a historical site but also create to develop a historical sense in the lay public, which in turn facilitates not only tourism directly but also stimulates conservation and protection of monuments indirectly. Engaging all five senses of tourist should be the motto of the 'experience' that can to a great extent, served by the positive involvement of the historians.

This is possible by creating platforms for the historians to share their views, experience and knowledge with the travelers on mediums, which directly touch the path of the lay traveler. For example

1. Writing to internet website platforms which have to be clearly branded as writings by historians and not either lay public or by other indirect means.

2. Writing to travel magazines and in flight magazines which are the first pieces of literature of an international traveler.
3. Creating Radio and television shows/documentaries on historic sites with the historian as the integral part.
4. Arranging live interactions with the historians at the heritage places on special occasions like *Khajuraho* Dance Festival, *Hampi Utsav*, *Pattadakal Utsav*, *Mysore Dasshera* celebrations etc, with emphasis not on historical research but more on making the tourists understand the historic importance of the place along with other cultural elements, both historic and contemporary.
5. Light and Sound shows are good examples that we have been seeing recently, which focus on storytelling. Such shows need to involve the historian directly to create a more authoritative feel.

Tourism departments and Tourism industry should incorporate historians as important stakeholders or consultants in making any serious Heritage Tourism based product. They can setup platforms and make products which connect the historians directly with the tourist thus enabling a traveler-historian bond and also bring the history research findings to the grassroots level and percolating it to the people at large.

The same platforms can also be used by educational institutions thus bringing a better awareness on the historical findings and also first-hand knowledge about the country's heritage. This approach, where the student is directly able to listen or interact with the historian can not only bring about a genuine interest in the cultural past but also lead to a generation of heritage conscious youth.

Historians on their part should consider it their moral and social responsibility to guide the people, tourists and provide correct version and holistic view about historical heritage. Any committed historian will surely do that. For the success of this, educational forums, universities and research centers should come forward to nurture the same by lending their services. Publication industry could pitch in by devoting columns and real estate for historian's writing in magazines and newspapers highlighting on heritage sites.

SUMMARY

It is seen that the Heritage Tourism has a huge potential both as an industry and as a tool for projection of India's cultural vibrancy, both to the outside world and domestic front. Traditionally, Tourism Industry and the historians have charted independent paths, ones academics and entrepreneurship, respectively. But now, there is a dire need of participation of historians in the Tourism Industry. Historians have a greater role to play in interpreting historical sites and proper portrayal of historical legacy more than ever. Historians' participation provides authentic cultural experience in tourist itinerary and promotes community pride, which in turn ushers in the phenomenon of responsible tourism. Focusing on quality gives the heritage site the edge. All this is possible through commitment and involvement of human resource in the form of historians. In conclusion it can be said that the participative historians are the future of Heritage Tourism industry.

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