

Archaeological and Heritage Tourism Interpretation A Study

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ABSTRACT

Archaeological Heritage Tourism has been developed throughout the world as an important segment of tourism industry. Particularly in India, heritage tourism has the highest market share compared to the other segments of the tourism industry since it offers a wide array of archaeological heritage attractions all over the country. Heritage tourism is an economic activity predicated on the use of inherited environmental and socio-cultural assets. The main focus of heritage tourism development is to boost the local economy and improve the standard of living of the host population by attracting tourists to the destination and to disseminate heritage knowledge to them. This research paper entails to examine the importance of authentic heritage interpretation at heritage tourism destinations and to suggest an effective heritage interpretation mechanism.

KEY WORDS: *Archaeological Heritage Tourism, Authentic Heritage Interpretation.*

Introduction

Heritage tourism in India is considered as an important segment of Tourism Industry. It has the highest market share compared to the other segments of the tourism industry. Tourists from all over the world visit India for appreciating and studying its rich heritage and culture. Heritage Tourism covers the education and research based tourism activities at historic buildings and monuments, the sites of important past events like battles, traditional landscapes and indigenous wild life, language, literature and music and art, traditional events and folklore practices, traditional life styles including food and drink and sports (Praveen Sethi 1999). Heritage tourism is, as an economic activity, predicated on the use of inherited environmental and socio-cultural assets in order to attract visitors. Sustainability requires that those assets are carefully managed to ensure that future generations inherit a resource base that is sufficient to support their needs and wants. (Fyall A., Garrod B., 1998). The main focus of heritage tourism development is to boost the local economy and improve the standard of living of the host population by attracting tourists to the destination and to disseminate heritage knowledge to them and in the meantime protecting the monument against destruction. Heritage interpretation and education is the core rationale of developing heritage tourism. Heritage interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information (Freeman Tilden, 1954). Authentic heritage interpretation is the communication of realistic information about, or the authentic explanation of, the nature, importance, and purpose of historical, natural, or cultural resources, objects, sites and phenomena using personal or non-personal methods. Heritage interpretation may be performed at dedicated interpretation centers or at museums, historic sites, parks, art galleries, nature centers, zoos, aquaria, botanical gardens, nature reserves and a host of other heritage sites. Its modalities can be extremely

varied and may include guided walks, talks, drama, staffed stations, displays, signs, labels, artwork, brochures, interactive, audio-guides and audio-visual media. Those who practice this form of interpretation may include rangers, guides, naturalists, museum curators, natural and cultural interpretive specialists, interpretation officers, heritage communicators, docents, educators, visitor services staff, interpreters or a host of other titles. Heritage interpretation is an important aspect of heritage tourism activity and every heritage destination should be well equipped to interpret the history and culture effectively and authentically.

Objectives of the Research

The main objective of this research is to identify and assess the importance of authentic heritage interpretation at the heritage tourism destinations and to evaluate that at what extent the existing interpreting mechanism is effective in disseminating the authentic information to the tourists. The study also envisages to suggest better ways to provide effective and efficient mechanism to ensure authentic heritage interpretation at the heritage site. The real research problem identified here is that there is a need to analyze and study at what extent the existing heritage interpretation mechanism at various heritage sites serve the purpose of heritage education and disseminate authentic heritage information to tourists. How effectively the heritage monuments and artifacts are interpreted to the tourists.

Are Heritage Interpretation Centre and Tourism Information Centre same?

Interpretation and information are not same. Information given or presented to visitors is just that straight facts, figures and dates. Interpretation contains information but it is not what one says to the visitor instead the way in which one says it to them (John Veverka, 2007). Heritage Interpretation is the process of conveying and translating heritage information in an understandable and meaning full way to the audience so that they should appreciate, remember and may possibly use the information in some way. Many tourists may not be known the real value of heritage and need for its protection and conservation. It is the duty of the interpreter to communicate effectively so that the attitude of the visitor can be influenced/ changed.

The Concept of Heritage Interpretation Centre

An interpretation centre, or interpretive centre, is an institution for dissemination of knowledge of natural or cultural heritage. Interpretation centers are a kind of new-style museum, often associated with visitor centers or eco-museums, and located in connection to cultural, historic or natural sites. Interpretation centers use different means of communication to enhance the understanding of heritage. To aid and stimulate the discovery process and the visitor's intellectual and emotional connection to heritage, the main presentation strategy tends to be user-friendly and interactive, and often use scenographic exhibitions and multimedia programs. Many interpretation centers have temporary exhibitions related to a specific aspect of the site. An interpretation centre can be a viable solution for effective communication of heritage information in municipalities and rural areas where resources may not exist to establish a traditional, full-scale museum, and where heritage can be an important factor for tourism development. Unlike traditional museums, interpretation centers do not usually aim to collect, conserve and study objects; they are specialized institutions for communicating the significance and meaning of heritage. They work to educate and raise awareness. Non-core jobs as conservation and research are services usually done by specialized, external entities.

Heritage Tourism Principles

The following five heritage tourism principles for a successful and sustainable heritage tourism program surely helps to avoid challenges that could arise due to tourism development at a heritage site.

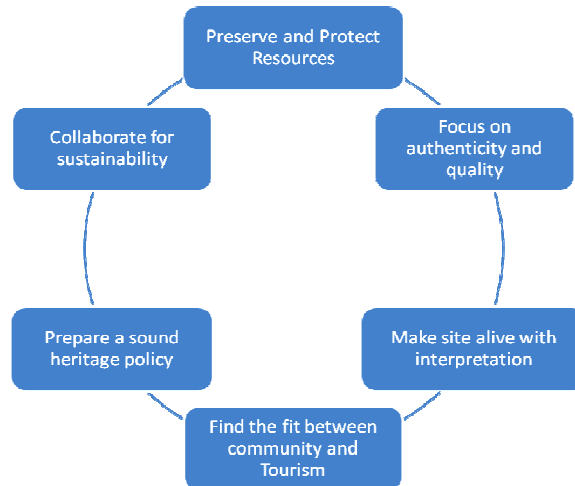


Fig. 1 : Principles of Heritage Tourism

Principle 1: Preserve and protect resources:- Plan for the preservation and protection of special places, sites and traditions that attract visitors, foster a good preservation ethic, follow and all applicable local, state and national laws in planning and preserving historic sites.

Principle 2: Focus on authenticity and quality:- The contributions of previous generations have made to the history and culture of the community are what make it unique and add value and appeal for visitors. Ensure accuracy and quality when sharing these contributions with visitors.

Principle 3: Make sites come alive with interpretation:- A destination is a place with a story. Use creative methods in interpreting the stories, special cultural sites, traditions, events and personalities that make the community or region distinctive. Be inclusive by sensitively telling the story of all groups that have made contributions to the heritage.

Principle 4: Find the fit between community and tourism:- Educate the community about heritage tourism and historic preservation. A community that values and protects its heritage will contribute to the successful development of a project with funds, volunteers and political support.

Principle 5: Collaborate for sustainability:- Tourism demands the participation of numerous individuals and organizations. Create partnerships to broaden support and chances for success; package sites and events in the community or region into a coherent visitor experience.

Principle 6 Prepare a sound heritage tourism policy:- The concerned authorities should develop a sound heritage tourism policy in consultation with local people and various stake holders of tourism industry within the frame work of the concept of sustainability and conservation and should be enforced by law.

Heritage interpretation is an essential component of heritage tourism since tourists visit a heritage destination for knowledge. Heritage Interpretation is a communication process, designed to reveal meaning and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage, through involvement with objects, artifacts, landscapes and sites (Interpretation Canada). People who visit a heritage destination are from various educational and cultural backgrounds so that it should be stressed that interpretive communication is not only simply presenting information, but a specific communication strategy that is used to translate that information for people, from the technical language of the experts to the everyday language of the visitor. The heritage interpreters at a heritage destination must have to understand that how

tourists learn and remember information in a recreational learning environment. A recreational learning experience is one where the person has self selected to attend or participate in a heritage learning programme. So that the learning experience at the heritage destination should be designed in such a way that it is suitable for all kinds of tourists ranging from children to adult and less educated to educated. The interpretative system should have a perfect mix of various techniques of communication. Proper heritage education at the destination certainly will reduce all problems of the negative impacts of tourism to the heritage site as well as the very purpose of the heritage tourism shall be achieved. The principles of effective heritage interpretation principles are taken from the Tiden's Principles of Communication (Tiden, 1954). Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information. Interpretation is an art which combines many arts whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase. Interpretation addressed to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program as:

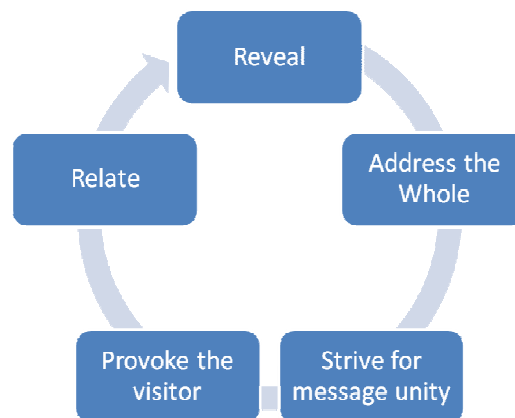


Fig. 2 : Principles of effective heritage interpretation

Provoke the visitor: The interpreter or media of interpretation must provoke curiosity, attention and interest among the visitors to listen, participate and actively involve in the heritage interpretation process. If curiosity is not generated, they may not read the information, will not take the service of the guides, never read brochures and other printed materials, will not go to the interpretation centre, will not visit museums, never keep the sanctity of the destination etc. The interest and curiosity towards heritage knowledge may vary from persons to persons depend upon their attitude and personality so that a heritage site must be equipped with various kinds of interpreting mechanisms, a perfect mix of interpretation tools, to satisfy the visitor diversity. While devising the interpretation strategy, the planner should ask a few questions like,

- Why would a visitor want to know particular information?
- How they can be attracted towards the interpretation media?
- How does interpretation and fun can be combined together?

Relate: The principle of relating the heritage information with the visitor's and nation's interest covers communicating how important the information is for the person as well as for the society and nation. The importance of heritage education, heritage preservation and protection should be related with social responsibility, fundamental duty, appreciation of heritage and culture, need of heritage knowledge, sustainability, social ethics and ethos etc. A heritage site can be treated as a lab for substantiating theoretical knowledge gained from various sources.

Reveal: The Reveal process, one should reveal the ending or answer of the communication through a unique or unusual perspective of viewpoint (John Viverka, 2007). The revealing part of the interpretation tells the visitor why the message is important for them or how they can benefit from the information that was interpreted to them.

Address the Whole: Address the complete aspects and dimensions of the heritage information so as to understand the concept absolutely.

Strive for Message Unity: While communicating information related to particular heritage, the interpreter should ensure that there is message unity and all the information disseminated should be confined to the theme and objectives of the heritage communication.

Conclusion

While developing tourism at an archaeological site, there is a need for a policy statement and its accompanying guidelines set out the benefits of using archaeological sites for educational purposes. While considering the management and sustainability needs of heritage sites, resource protection considerations, public access, current and long-term threats, and maintenance requirements are the issues which needs attention. The policy should be developed in such a manner that it should encourage balancing educational and tourism goals and objectives with privacy and preservation concerns through consultation among all involved and concerned parties. The policy urges that decisions about appropriate use of archaeological resources be made in consultation with persons, organizations, and entities that describe values and significance to them. Every heritage tourism destination is essentially in need of a sound heritage tourism policy to ensure healthy and sustainable heritage tourism development having win-win situation rather zero sum game. The heritage tourism policy having an effective and efficient heritage interpretation mechanism essentially ensures sustainable and responsible heritage tourism development at heritage destinations. Self explanatory heritage interpretation tools should be widely used throughout the heritage site. A heritage interpretation centre equipped with audio visual interpretation tools and trained interpreters definitely educate the tourists in relation to the heritage and culture. Skilled and trained man power in the field of heritage interpretation is an essential requirement of every heritage destination so as to make heritage tourism industry more focused towards heritage education. A heritage site should be converted into a disciplined classroom devoid of walls!

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