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Tourist Potentials and Attractions in Ajmer

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Abstract: The concept of touring or travelling has been very old in cultural heritage of Ajmer. It is a natural phenomena and human desire to make a round of the beautiful places of interest – monuments, historical sites, places of pilgrimage and places that arouse curiosity. The paper aims to provide a holistic perspective on sustainable tourism at Ajmer district. The paper discusses various tourist attraction spots of Ajmer city, current situations and issues related to tourism and heritage conservation, development strategies, planning, objectives of government and also suggested steps to boost tourism and to save the golden memories of our glorious past. Methodology used in this is based on both primary data(observations, interviews, informations gathered from tourists, shopkeepers, hoteliers to seek their views with regard to tourist attraction) and secondary data(data collected through government institutions, ashrams,R.T.D.C. Ajmer). Besides this necessary information have been collected from various books, brochures, magazines, journals and travel literature published by various agencies.

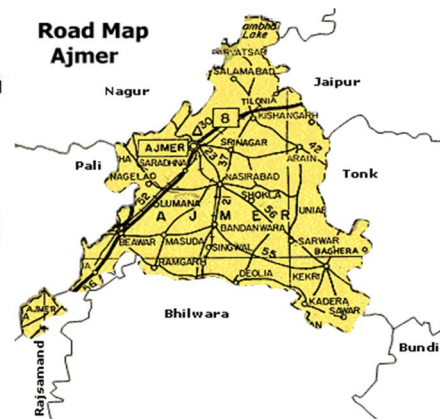
Keywords: Tourist, tourism, sustainable, experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian slogan ‘Athithi devo bhava’ means that guests are like God. Rajasthan has emerged as one of the popular tourist destination in India for both domestic and foreign tourists. The forts and palaces, heritage hotels, colourful fairs and festivals, local art and handicrafts, etc has been a unique selling proposition for tourists coming to the state.

Ajmer, formerly written Ajmere, is a district in Indian state of Rajasthan. It is surrounded by the hills of the Aravalli range, 132 Kms west of Jaipur founded by Ajay Pal Chauhan in the 7th century. Ajmer got its name from ‘Ajaymeru’. After him came the legend that is narrated and sometimes word of mouth ‘Prithviraj Chauhan’ the last great hindu ruler who was defeated by Mohammad Ghauri. And after that Ajmer changed hands to become a home to many dynasties. But each one of them left behind valuable marks of their culture and traditions. In 1556 AD it became an integral part of the Mughal empire, and this became the beginning of a near perfect bonding between two faiths, Hinduism and Islam.

The famous Dargah Sharif, tomb of the sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chishti is a popular pilgrimage centre for muslims. As an aside, Ajmer is also the base for visiting Pushkar about 14 kms away. The abode of Lord Brahma the lake at Pushkar is a sacred spot for the Hindus, where they take a holy dip. Other places of attractions are Adhai Din Ka Jhopra, the magnificent Anasagar lake, subhash udhyan, Soni Ji Ki Nasiyan (Red Temple), Prithvi Raj Chauhan Smarak, Mayo college, Government museum (Ajmer fort), etc.



A. Tourist attractions of Ajmer

Dargah Khwaja Saheb – The dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, popularly known as Khwaja Sahib is a place of worship of muslims, often called Sultan-ul-Hind and popularly known as Ghareeb Nawaz. Built in the early 13th century. It is situated at the

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foot of the northeastern spur of the Taragarh hill. Its an irregular rectangle, with its principal entrance to the north.



The visitors passes under the 'Buland Darwaza'(or the great door) made of silver which leads to the second courtyard. The grave of the saint has a domed chamber, the actual tomb is in white marble inland with pieces of coloured stones. 'Quawwals'(singers of quawwalis) from all over the world, come to sing praises of the saint, here 'fakirs' plead for alms,while khadims lookout for pilgrims. Two large 'Degs'(cauldrons) originally donated by Mughal emperor Akbar and Jahangir are placed in the courtyard in which rice pudding is cooked. 'Urs' (the death anniversary of the Khwaja) is a six days celebration and it begins on the first day of the Islamic month of the Rajab and ends on the sixth day.

Anasagar lake and Subhash udhyan – This beautiful and alluring artificial lake is situated middle of theAjmer city built in the 12th century and named after Anaji Chauhan. The 'Baradari'(pavilion) was built in 1637 by art lover Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. The huge embankment erected with people's help is afine example of the corporate life in Ajmer.



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Adhai Din Ka Jhopra – A remarkable structure, it is an inimitable example of primitive Indo-Islamic architecture, its construction took two and a half days(adhai din) to complete.



It was originally a Sanskrit college, in 1193 A.D. Muhammad Ghori converted the building into a mosque by adding a seven arched wall in front of the pillared hall. The Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra is rich in inscriptions, Ghori constructed seven arched walls around the mosque and engraved it with calligraphic verses from the Holy Quran. Later, an attractive tower was added to the place. Today, this striking piece of architecture masterpiece stands tall with its towering domes, pillars, and arched screens. Two of the biggest attractions of this mosque are its main hall embellished with carved pillars, and arches made of yellow limestone on the main front wall of the entrance. The walls of the prayer hall are beautifully carved with intriguing rectangular panels, much like the Persian mosques, which lend this place an aura of elegance. The area of the mosque is still used as a place of worship.

Soniji Ki Nasiyan(Red Temple) – The Nasiyan is a Dighambar Jain Temple, also known as Siddhikut Chaitalaya was constructed by Seth Mool Chand Soni in 1865 A.D. Behind this temple is the Saarna Nagari Hall, containing wooden representations of scenes from Jain mythology.

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The hall which measures 80 ft. By 40 ft. is richly painted in beautiful colours and the walls and the roofs are covered with beautiful glass mosaic work. The hall has many interesting murals. It has illustrative representatives of the birth and life of Rishabhadev or Adhinath, the first Tirthankara of the sect. The hall also has illustrations of Ayodhya and Allahabad cities.

Prithviraj Chauhan Smarak – Built in 1994 at amidst Taragarh mountain, this magnificent memorial is dedicated to Prithviraj Chauhan III, the last hindu ruler of India. The main attraction of this smarak is the pure metal statue of Prithviraj Chauhan which is 10 feet long and 9 ½ feet in height seated on horse, holding a bow and an arrow in hands.



In smarak premises different exhibitory rooms are made which depict different episodes of personality of Prithviraj Chauhan in paintings. Other major attraction of the smarak are garden, fountain, park for children to enjoy. There is coloured and attractive modern lights arrangement to enhance the beauty of smarak. The architecture of smarak is such that it recieves the first ray of light in dawnand last ray in dusk.

B. Mayo college

One of India's best public schools, located in the south-east of the city, named after the Governor General of India, Lord Mayo it was basically established in 1875 A.D. It has a museum displaying historical objects of interest and biological preservation. It is located inside the prestigious Mayo College school in Ajmer.

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For a museum of such a calibre which belongs to a school, it is undoubtedly the best school museum in the world. The museum has cultural relics showcasing the rich heritage of Rajasthan. From rare stamps from around the world to 14th and 15th century armoury used by erstwhile princely estates, to a rare diamond, paintings, artefacts etc, this is one great museum to visit while in Ajmer.

Government Museum (Akbar Fort)- It is the most prominent object in the landscape from all parts of valley of Ajmer and it is of great historical importance.



Once the royal residence of Emperor Akbar. He fortified it for monitoring the operations in Rajputana and Gujarat as he used to visit Ajmer concerning political issues. British occupied the place in 1818 and extensively fortified it during the 1857 revolt. The museum houses a rich repository of the Mughal and Rajput armour and exquisite sculptures and earned the popular name 'Magazine'. Every evening sound and light show available here.

Taragarh Fort- One can have an excellent view of the Ajmer city from here. Earlier known as 'Ajay Meru Durg' and 'Garh

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Beethli' as it is built on hill locally called Beethi. It has total 9 gates, these gates make entry into the fort inaccessible for invaders.



The fort was the site of the military activity during the Mughal period, later used as a sanatorium by the British. It is now connected with a motorable road. Taragarh is also known for its mosque and shrine of Miran sayyed Hussian, Governor of the fort.

II. CURRENT SITUATION AND KEY ISSUES

A. Tourist arrival in Ajmer during last thirteen years

Year	Indian	Foreigner
2004	1125410	1315
2005	1540100	3665
2006	1701000	16494
2007	1985600	17452
2008	2067475	25796
2009	1977605	22517
2010	2585110	25731
2011	2726585	30767
2012	3753260	30750
2013	4241880	27016
2014	4245710	33069
2015	4543300	36421
2016(upto November)	4510670	37688

Department of Culture provides 14 schemes of financial assistance to promote and sustain cultural activities, by provide monetary help to individuals, groups and voluntary organizations, although none provide direct support to conservation of built heritage.

A large number of poor tourists visiting the city during a short period (about 2 weeks during the Urs), depend significantly on civic agencies to provide for their needs and have poor paying capacity.

There is clearly a lack of promoting heritage tourism in Ajmer. Because of paucity of funds a number of monuments lie in derelict condition, e.g. Adhai din ka Jhonpara, Taragarh Fort. There is inadequate information about the historical sights the city has to offer. Classic example is of Akbar's fort which lies behind the Municipal Council Office, which is hardly visited by tourists.

The poor approach to the historical sights is also a deterrent in attracting tourists.

Absence of institutionalize financing arrangements for heritage conservation – conservation traditionally has not been a national priority, as it gets little or no funding in annual budgets.

The facilities provided to the pilgrims at vishram sthali s are highly inadequate. The structures built many years ago have deteriorated due to poor maintenance.

Traffic and transportation facilities near the Dargah are insufficient and extremely chaotic. The narrow approach roads to the Dargah are incapable of handling lakhs of pilgrims, often causing risk of stampedes and accidents.

The number of foreign tourists has declined significantly. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the package of tourism experience in Ajmer has not improved significantly in the past few years.

B. Development strategies, planning and objectives of government to be implemented

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To make Ajmer an international tourist destination by leveraging historical, natural, cultural heritage in addition to present religious attraction, government has following objectives which are to be checked-

To conserve and restore heritage monuments in Ajmer.

To increase the number of tourists (domestic & foreign) visiting Ajmer in a sustainable

To prolong the average stay of tourists.

To provide a circulation system that efficiently serves citizens and tourists.

Decongestion of core area to reduce pollution

Adequate access to the town and Improved pedestrian facilities within the heritage town.

C. Strategies

To protect and rehabilitate heritage features as well as improve opportunities and provide incentives for the local community to be involved. Along with the implementation of the work program is its operations and maintenance, containing a fiscally responsible plan defining the routine, ongoing operating and maintenance activities needed to ensure clean, safe and preserved heritage assets.

Promote new locations - As a part of promotion strategy, it is recommended to develop and leverage new venue for revenue generation, from tourism, through establishment of Arts and Crafts village, Development of Location as picnic spot etc.

It is proposed to weed Ajmer-Pushkar, in major tourist circuits of the State, in a way so as to promote overnight stay. Apart from this, it is recommended to promote single/multiple day package tours, with the City as base location. It is recommended to promote establishment of heritage properties and budget hotels, and associated facilities, with support from ITDC, RTDC, and private developers.

Community (individuals, owners, corporate s and institutions) involvement, through measures like fiscal incentives, grants for development and sponsorshipschemes, and community awareness should be an integral and important component of the strategy.

It is recommended to improve connectivity of Ajmer to other major cities. Although, the city is well connected at the state level, there is a need to augment connectivity improvement at national level.

Measures to attract more tourists, include media promotion, voluntary exhibition to promote event and handicrafts and organizing new events.

Promote avenues of growth with rural tourism and adventure tourism – to devise different promotional options for domestic and international tourists to bring them to Ajmer and prolong their stay.

Improvement and provision of tourist facilities - It is recommended to provide for basic facilities at all major tourist destination in the City, like Dargah, Akbar s Fort, Adhai-Din-Ka-Jhopra, Taragarh etc; to leverage full potentials of attracting more tourists and improving ambient environment at the locations. It is recommended to provide cafeteria, reception centre, public convenience blocks, drinking water, parking areas, etc.

Various tenders are issued under Ajmer Development Authority for development of the various tourists destinations and improve the improve the existing situation in planned manner in Ajmer city.

To ensure that the development of these destinations adhere to the sustainability and carrying capacity of the destinations.

III. CONCLUSION

The growth in the tourism turnover in recent years confirms that the district is on the path towards making tourism as an active generator of its economic development. From the research, analysis

and the discussion of results, following conclusions are drawn:

Ajmer is the result of socio-cultural and religious attractions. People stay for months together to absorb the local tradition and culture. The potential of tourism of Rajasthan is yet to be tapped fully. This requires combination of efforts on both policy and marketing side. Internet marketing is another area which needs to be focus of marketers for promotion.

groups Socio-cultural pollution is also increasing because of the impact of the tourists on the life of the residents specially the younger generation along with the escalation in crime rate like pick pocketing.

Maintenance and cleanliness of tourist spots and properties with the help of urban local bodies and tourism department.

Tourists at large find themselves confined to only fairs and festivals. This participates to short staying of tourists and sometimes may hinder future visits by the same tourists. As a matter of fact, the government needs to be proactive i.e. act before the situation turns uncontrollable.

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A. Suggestions

It is felt that if the following suggestions if taken into consideration there will be considerable improvements :

Tourism must be given the status of priority sector. Preservation of heritage and greater involvement of private sector.

Check on better connectivity between the various tourist centers in the city .Government should be firm in its policy, regularly check the licence and provide good knowledge to the tourists so that they are not misguided by the traditional bluffs of the shopkeepers Steps should be taken to avoid any harassment and restrictions imposed on tourists. A need for tourists sensitive policy is essential.

Views of the local community should be considered on the environmental and social impact of tourism thereby contributing to a better valuation of the natural resources in the locality.

Tourism development plans should be integrated paying attention to environment consideration like protection of natural and cultural heritage, air and water conservation. Renovation and reactivation of the infrastructure is needed.

The knowledge of the mechanism and benefits of tourism needs to be provided to all the components of tourism at Ajmer.

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