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AN ASSESSMENT OF TOURISM POTENTIAL OF KURUKSHETRA (HARYANA)

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to make an assessment of tourism potential of Kurukshetra. For the purpose, the researcher analyses the current position and future prospects of Kurukshetra as tourism destination and highlight the various tourism policies adopted by Government into this concern. The present research is theoretical in nature. For the theoretical foundation and analysis, the existing literature was investigated. The ultimate effects of this paper lead to significant growth of tourism industry in the study area. It is expected that destination stakeholders can enjoy a positive growth of this industry if proper steps can be taken towards the development of tourism.

KEY WORDS:

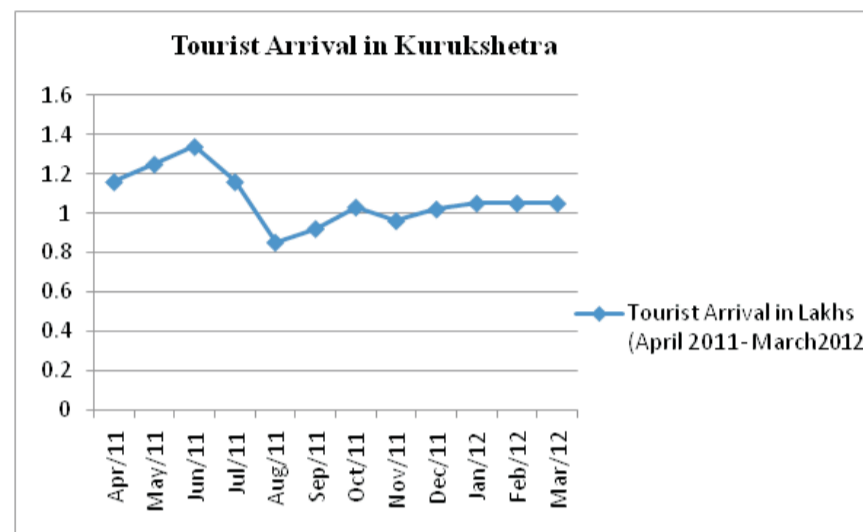
Potential, prospects, policy, significant, tourism industry.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism as a modern term applicable to both international and domestic tourists it is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal work and residence. Such a pleasure-seeking tourist is a traveller moving from place or visiting the same place repeatedly (Hussain, 2013). It is one of the fastest growing and a largest industry at both global as well as domestic perspective is really remarkable. Many nations totally depend upon tourism as a main source of foreign exchange earnings and employment generations. This continued growth in tourism business throughout the world is encouraging and nations are becoming more concern to attract more tourists to their own destinations and trying to promoting this sector as a major source for the economic development of the nation (Hossain, 2006).

Tourism industry in India is on a great boom at the instant. India has a great prospective to be a key tourist destination in the world. It's among the fastest growing tourism market. Kurukshetra district of Haryana state of India is very popular among the national and international visitors who primarily visit for religious purpose. It is situated in the state of Haryana, India, 160 km north from Delhi and 91 km south from Chandigarh and known as The land of the Bhagavad-Gita. The city is well connected by rail and road network and lies on the Delhi-Ambala stretch of the National Highway number 1. It is one of those holy towns that have borne the imprint of Lord Krishna's footprints. Belief seized that the great 18-day encounter between the Pandavas and Kauravas in which Lord Krishna played his mysterious part, as illustrated in the pages of the epic Mahabharata, was scraped on the holy land of Kurukshetra. It is said in the Puranas that those who visit this area or reside here even for a while, go straight to heaven after life. In spite of Mahabharti battle field it also has number of tourist places which attracts tourists from everywhere. Month wise tourist arrival in Kurukshetra is show below:

Exhibit I: Month wise Tourist arrival in Kurukshetra from April-2011 to March-2012



Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2012

The growth of this industry has now raised a warning alarm for the developers and stakeholders, bringing forth concerns and dilemmas of future planning and growth which needs to be emphasized more on research based tourism planning. The insistent advertising campaign “Incredible India” by the tourism ministry of India also changes the image of India worldwide. In order to accomplish the aims and objectives, this campaign piece of work focused on the promotion of destinations throughout the world. Tourism plays an important role in the socio-economic development of any nation. It is also one of the main sources to earn foreign exchange, and created employment opportunities for urban as well as rural public. The present study focus to identify the destination of Kurukshetra as a tourist destination.

The significance of tourism is viewed from many angles like economic, social, cultural, political, etc. which has led the ever increasing competition among the destinations and gained the top priority in most of the destinations countries. Marketers need to provide such necessary information to the prospective tourists through different promotional ways and thus, try to stimulate and attract them to the sponsor's destination (Hossain, 2006).

In the year of 2003 Ministry of tourism give its recommendation for Haryana Tourism is to develop Haryana in three phases. Phase 1 is to develop destination tourism on NH1. Kurukshetra and Morni Hills projects address this aspect. Kurukshetra to become a destination and a hub. Phase 2 is to develop Rohtak as a getaway destination for Delhi residents Develop Hissar/ Hansi as a mega project on the lines of Kurukshetra. Hissar to become a destination and a hub. Village tourism in Agroha and Phase 3 is to Join the two hubs of Kurukshetra and Hissar through a good quality road Kurukshetra-Thanesar-Pehowa-Kaithal-Jind-Hissar. Develop Sirsa to draw tourists further down the highway.

The above facts showed that Kurukshetra is among major tourist destinations of the state. To reap the multiplier benefits of tourism the Government starts various plans and strategies from time to time.

Kurukshetra was the best suited place for promotion of cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourism. So this place was selected to establish it as a major tourist destination of the state. Large number of renovation plans were formulated for development of Kurukshetra like renovation of Jyotisar and Braham Sarovar. These plans started in 1980 and continued throughout the nineties. Kurukshetra Development Board renovated these sites (Tomer, 2011).

As mentioned above, in order to develop Kurukshetra as tourism sport there is strong need to effectively identify the tourism potential of this place. The present study attempted to fill the existing gap by focussing 'AN ASSESSMENT OF TOURISM POTENTIAL OF KURUKSHETRA (HARYANA)'.

OBJECTIVES

To make an assessment of tourism potential of Kurukshetra to develop as tourist destination.
The offer various suggestions for the promotion of Kurukshetra as a tourism destination.

PANORAMA OF THE TOURIST PLACES OF KURUKSHETRA

Brahma Sarovar : Among the holiest of water tanks in India, the Brahma Sarovar is an important place to visit in Kurukshetra. This large water body is edged with wide platforms, stairs and a wide 'parikarma'. A number of meditation chambers have been built for the convenience of religious tourists. It is believed that it is the cradle of Indian civilization because Lord Brahma, the Creator of the Universe, conceived the Earth here. A dip in the Sarovar bears the sanctity of performing Ashwamedha Yajna, absolves one of all the sins.

Sri Krishna Museum A touch of history and archaeology of the area can be seen at the Sri Krishna Museum setup near the Brahma Sarovar. This museum is dedicated of Lord Krishna and was established in 1991 after collecting various art objects which celebrated the theme of Lord Krishna. The artifacts of museum present, Krishna as a God, a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, a great Philosopher, an epic hero, an astute statesman and a supreme lover. Idols and frescoes found during various excavations in the area have also been displayed in this museum.

Kurukshetra Panorama & Science Centre: The Kurukshetra Panorama and Science Centre is a beautiful cylindrical building that is used for exhibitions and working models for visitor's activities. The Kurukshetra Panorama and Science Centre have two different types of exhibits in the ground floor and in the first floor with cylindrical walls. A few scientific objects also are displayed in the ground floor of the centre. The main attraction of the Centre is a life-like Panorama of the epic battle of Kurukshetra. Standing at the centre of the cylindrical hall, one can feel the towering 34 feet high paintings of the episodes from the 18-day confrontation between the Pandavas and the Kauravas come alive before his eyes. A Science Park has also been set up outside the four walls of the centre's building.

Bhishma Kund at Naraktari: The place where Arjuna shot an arrow towards the earth to quench Bhishma Pitamah's thirst. A temple and water tank (Bhisham Kund) is situated here. The tank resulted when Arjun shot an arrow in the ground to arrange water for Bhishmma Pitahma when he laid on the arrow-bed.

Lakshmi Narayna Temple.- The Lakshmi Narayana Temple lies close to the Sri Krishna museum. It is dedicated to Lord Narayana and His consort Lakshmi. Temple has a huge double storied building having three traditional architectural components. The first section lies on a high plinth having seven projections whereas the second chamber is a long corridor hall having seven projected areas on either side, bearing transacted windows.

Sannihit Sarovar: Sannihit Sarovar is yet another sacred water tank. Legend has it that hundreds of years ago people, burdened by their sins, sought help from the Lord. At this, the Lord said 'On the days of Amavasyas (nights of total darkness) or on the days of an eclipse, if you collect the water of Sannihit tank, your sins will be absolved.' Ever since, the tank has been the venue of millions of devotees who perform the Ashwamedha Yajna. Bathing ghats and steps have been set up here for pilgrims. Temples dedicated to Dhruva Narayan, Mother Goddess Durga and Lord Hanuman can be seen here.

Nabha House.- Situated opposite to the Sannihit Sarovar at Kurukshetra, this palatial building was constructed by the royal family of Nabha principality during 19th century and was being used by its member for stay during religious performances at Kurukshetra. The building stands on a raised platform, the entrance gate of which is on the eastern side, either sides are decorated with four arched niches. There are two beautiful pillar windows on the 2nd floor of the building. A temple dedicated to God Brahma is constructed on the top of this magnificent building. It represents the Hindu style of architecture in early British era.

Gurudwaras: A few gurdwaras at Kurukshetra have acquired great sanctity and have become places of religious interest. The site where Guru Nanak stayed is now worshipped as Gurdwara Sadbhiti. Another gurdwara stands besides it where the sixth Guru Har Gobind stayed during a visit. Again, the ninth Guru, Shri Tegh Bahadur stayed at a spot near the Sthaneshwar Tirtha that is marked by a gurdwara. Another prominent gurdwara called Raj Ghat is devoted to the memory of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh.

Gita Mandir.- Popularly known as Birla Mandir, it was built by Jugal Kishore Birla in the mid-fifties of the 20th century. It is one of the premier temples of this region and also a specimen of Hindu architecture in modern times. The main deity of the temple is Lord Krishna. Full text of the Bhagvadgita, the song celestial, is engraved on the walls around the main temple. Another attraction is a large size all marble chariot driven by four horses and depicting Lord Krishna delivering the message of the Gita to Arjuna.

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Janamashtmi festival is celebrated here with great enthusiasm.

Sheikh Chehli Mausoleum: The tomb of Sheikh Chilli Jalal is a fascinating monument, octagonal in shape, crowned with a dome of white marble and surrounded by a white marble courtyard. Tourists can also check out Chini Masjid and Pathar Masjid, built in the Mughal architectural style. A peer dargah is also situated inside tomb.

Raja Karan Ka Qila.- It is a small mound about 3 miles (5 kilometres) to the west and southwest of Thanesar. It is about 500 square feet (46.5 square metres) at the top, 800 square feet (74 square metres) at the base with the height of 30 to 40 feet (9 to 12 metres). Sherds of Painted Gray Ware and some other objects such as a flesh rubber, a terracotta reel, a mould for printing cloth, a human head, a double inkpot, a hollow terracotta rattle, a flattened bronze object appearing to be a late derivative of a celt with crescentic circle, an earthen chati (pot) having a line of trisula and wheel carved on it, one earthen pitcher ornamented round the shoulder and some pieces of glazed pottery of the Muslim period have been found here.

Raja Harsha Ka Tila.- Situated in Thanesar Town adjacent to the Sheikh Chilli's tomb, the Raja Harsh Ka Tila dated back to Circa 1st century AD. Found in a circumference of 1 Km. X 750m., its excavation indicates the existence of a settlement before starting a continuous habitation at the site since Christian era. The study of excavated material divides it into six cultural periods from Circa 1st century AD to 19th century AD i.e. Kushana period, Gupta period, post Gupta and Vardhamana period, Rajput period, Sultanate period and Mughal period (upto 1806 AD) etc.

Asthipura.- It lies to the west of Thanesar and to the south of the Aujas ghat and marks the place where the bodies of the persons slain in the Mahabharata War were cremated. Yuan Chwang visit to this place in the 7th century A.D. also bears testimony to this fact. Cunningham excavated the mound which measures about 700 feet by 500 feet (213 metres by 152 metres) and found "an extensive platform of unbaked bricks still 364 feet (111 metres) in length", besides many remains of walls and fragments of terracotta sculptures.

Sthanesvara Mahadev Temple: It can doubtlessly be said that the presiding deity of Kurukshetra is Lord Shiva. It is after the Sthanesvar Shiva Linga that Thanesar (twin town of Kurukshetra) gets its name. Vaman Puran categorically mentions its importance and legends tell us that Lord Brahma Himself laid the first Linga of Lord Shiva at this temple. It was renovated in recent times. A large water body is lying adjacent to the temple. A Gurudwara also stands on its opposite bank.

Bhadra Kali Temple.- From the legend of Sati, springs the existence of Maa Bhadra Kali temple. The legends say it is the sanctity of a Sidha Peeth (Place where wishes are fulfilled). It lies at a short 4 Km. drive from the railway station. The temple has been renovated with red stone. The inner sanctum of the temple houses are inspiring and the sublime forms of the Mother Goddess Kali. Thousands of devotees throng the temple on the holy days of Navratre (March-April and September-October) and every Saturday.

Jyotisar: It is another very important place of pilgrimage. It is situated on the Kurukshetra Pehowa road. The old bed of the sacred river Saraswati lies near Jyotisar village in the shape of narrow canal. At Jyotisar, no relic is seen except a banyan tree which is said to have been there for more than 5,000 years. Lord Krishna is believed to have delivered his message of the Bhagwadgita to Arjuna at this place. Adi Shankracharya also visited this place on his way to Badrinath and Kedarnath.

Pehowa : It is an ancient town not far from Kurukshetra has been a centre of pilgrimage for ages. It is on the left bank of the sacred Saraswati, twelve kilometers from Thanesar. Today, it is an ancient place of great sanctity, where prayer and 'pind daan' for ancestors is believed to grant 'moksha' or redemption from the cycle of birth and death. Pehowa is also famous for temples devoted to Shiva and his son Kartikkya. Unlike the other temples, the temple dedicated to Shiva, has no linga. Instead, it has a panch-mukhi (5 faced) idol of Lord Shiva which is said to be one of its kind. Haryana Tourism runs its Anjan Yatrika Resort for pilgrims visiting Pehowa.

Gita Jayanti Celebrations.- It falls in November / December every year. A fair of festivity pervades the town of Kurukshetra. The event celebrates the birth of Shrimad Bhagwadgita. Discourses on the Bhagwadgita, pageants based on the epic Mahabharata, ballets that celebrate Lord Sri Krishna, camps for social service and the unforgettable deep daan at the Brahma Sarovar are an experience one has to see.

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Kurukshetra Fair.- This fair is the event held whenever the solar eclipse occurs. This results in the arrival of lakhs of pilgrims. Legend has it that on every amavas (moonless night) and during every eclipse, waters of all tirthas assemble in the Sannihit tank. By performing Shradha (prayer for ancestors) and taking a holy dip in the Brahma Sarovar on these days, one acquires the fruit of ashamedah yajnas.

Somavati Amavasya.- It is another special festival held in the town. Every time when the Amavasya falls on Monday, a festival is held at the holy water tanks of Brahma Sarovar and Sannihit Sarovar when thousands of pilgrims throng for a bath in the waters of the tanks.

Shivratri.- It is the night consecrated to Lord Shiva, one of the Gods of Hindu Trinity. The festival has the special significance of being one of the four Maharatris. Legend has it that one who stays awake the entire night deep in meditation of Lord Shiva, is granted Moksha or redemption from the cycle of life and death. To be here on this day at the Sthanesvar Mahadev temple is said to be a very special blessing. The festival falls in February or March every year.

HARYANA TOURISM POLICY, 2008

The development which has taken place in the field of tourism in the state is establishment of new Tourism Policy, 2008. The main aim of this tourism policy is employment generation, poverty alleviation and women empowerment with the help of tourism. It gives an emphasis on partnership between the public sector and the private sector for sustainable development of tourism. "Broadly, the policy document attempts to provide constructive value in diverse fields. It aims to promote tourism as a major engine of economic growth and capitalize potential of sustainable tourism for employment generation. To take advantage of the global travel trade and to develop untapped potential of Haryana and to acknowledge the critical working as proactive facilitator and catalyst in order to meet new tourism market requirements". (Tourism Policy, Haryana, 2008).

The new tourism policy focused on to develop various tourist circuits i.e. Panipat-Pinjore-Kurukshetra as tourist circuit and also to promote Mahabharata circuit, Sufi circuit, eco-tourism circuit and heritage circuit to be developed with the help of public-private partnership. This policy strongly focus on Kurukshetra to be developed as a pilgrim destination with world class infrastructure. Pinjore, Surajkund, and Kurukshetra to be developed as heritage destinations too as well as tourist guide system to be introduced in Kurukshetra, Pinjore and Morni areas.

IDENTIFICATION OF TOURIST CIRCUITS

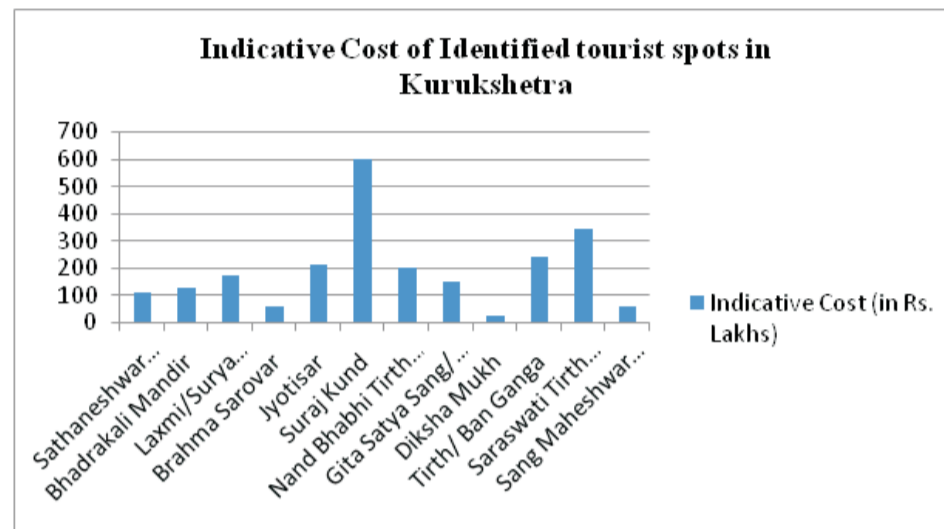
After recognizing the growing importance of tourism the Ministry of Tourism (2012) has started a project to identify the tourist circuit across India. The ministry also identified four circuits in Haryana i.e. Circuit 1: Kalka - Panchkula - Naraingarh- Yamuna Nagar - Kurukshetra - Thanesar - Pehowa-Panipat.

This circuit has been taken on priority basis. The Kurukshetra as part of Circuit 1 has been selected because it is a city with religious significance, characterised by numerous temples and kunds, where thousands flock to during the peak season. Despite its high domestic tourist inflow, there are issues in facilities such as accommodation and parking. The sites are well maintained by temple trusts except in some cases where non-availability of continuous water supply for the kund has led to a decline in tourist inflow.

An assessment of tourism infrastructure between major tourist destinations has been done. Each of the destinations and their enroot stretches have been assessed. For the enhancement of transport facilities, increase the number of accommodation Units, developing tourism infrastructural facilities, Upgrading the tourist information & communication facilities, redeveloping and beautification of tourist places in Kurukshetra the Ministry of tourism, by adopting Public-Private- Partnership mode in collaboration with several other bodies such Haryana Tourism Corporation Limited, Public Works Department, started various projects worth Rs. 85 crore (Ministry of Tourism, 2012).

The Government has also planned attractive outlay for identified tourist circuits in the state. A brief snap shot of outlay for Various tourist sites of Kurukshetra identified by Ministry of Tourism.

Exhibit II: Indicative cost of Kurukshetra tourist sites under circuits 1



Source: Ministry of Tourism (2012)

TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES AVAILABLE AT KURUKSHETRA

Main services and facilities available to the tourists are as under:

Transportation Facility

Kurukshetra is well connected with Chandigarh and Delhi by Road, Train and Air. Train is the most commonly used mode of travel especially by the middle class.

Medical Facility

During festivals and Sun Eclipses special arrangements are made for providing medical aid to the pilgrims/tourists. Team of experienced doctors is appointed for the same. Further, ambulance facilities are also provided for the needy. The number of ambulances are increased or decreased as per the need of the occasion. Two main Government Hospitals in Kurukshetra are Shri Krishana Government Aurvedic College and LNJP Hospital.

Information Centre

To provide adequate information about Kurukshetra, three tourist information centres have been established at Pipli, Braham Sarovar and Jyotisar.

Banking Facilities

Most of the banks have their branches at Kurukshetra. Branches of some banks providing ATM facilities.

Accommodation

A large number of accommodation facilities both private and government are there in Kurukshetra for pilgrims/tourists. Two government Tourism complexes namely Parakeet Tourist Resort and Neelkanth Yatri Niwas established in the city. In addition to these number of Guest houses, Lodges, Dharamshala etc. were available for tourists.

Kurukshetra Development Board

Haryana Government found a lot of tourism potential Kurukshetra and decided to develop tourist importance of Kurukshetra. For integrated development of Kurukshetra a high powered autonomous Kurukshetra Development Board was formulated on 1st August, 1968 (Tomer, 2011). The main functions of the board are the overall development of the place including its landscaping, renovation of historical places and sacred religious tanks and provision of facilities to tourists. Building of roads and drains, rest houses and sarais lying out of parks and orchards, provision of transport and sanitary facilities etc. and renovation of the Kurukshetra tank (Braham Sarovar) and providing a few basic amenities to the local public in general and the tourists in particular.

SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE KURUKSHETRA AS TOURIST DESTINATION

Kurukshetra has abundance of tourist spots. The sector has immense potential for development due to the availability of tourism sites. The identification of core deficiencies, requirement of facilitating products and subsequently overcoming the issues are essential for paving the way for development of this niche sector in a way so that it can become a major attraction for inbound tourists. The researcher put some

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suggestions to roadmap the way for the development of religious tourism in the study region:

Developing more Tourism Circuits.
Providing the tourists with a holistic tourism experience.
Minimizing the impact on the environment and maintaining the ecological balance.
Preservation of local & ethnic Culture.
Improving connectivity and accessibility to specific tourism circuits.
Developing the Image of the Destination.
Allocation of more Promotional Funds.
Linkages with Tour Operators.
More Discounted Offer for a Group Tour and Long Stay.
Government should framework proper regulations and policies to promote tourism at Kurukshetra.
Developing Infrastructure Facilities and Diversified Products/Services.

CONCLUSION

The destination of Kurukshetra has enough potential to benchmark itself as famous tourist spots but it lacks to market its incredible tourist attractions. Kurukshetra tourism needs to attempt more efforts activities to cope up with the present competition among the destinations. The mutual arrangements such as linkages with foreign tour operators, providing sufficient online information regarding facilities of the destination, attractive offers like discounted air tickets, discount on hotel rent, and encouraging private sectors' investment by adopting PPP model etc. All these will play the motivational role for the potential tourists to select Kurukshetra as tourist destination. It is also necessary to join hands with media which have international coverage in order to attract the attention of the foreign tourists and persuade them to select Kurukshetra as a tourist destination. So, the concern authority needs to give priority and adopt necessary effective strategies in order to attract a significant number of tourists to visit the destination. Similar studies on some other destinations or on some other forms of tourism can also be conducted for the betterment of tourism industry.

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