



Cultural Tourism - A Study of Rann Utsav

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Introduction

Culture is the life lived by a group of people living in a specific region and the patterning of it. The United Nations agency UNESCO has defined culture as the “set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of a society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.” (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org>)

India’s culture is among the world's oldest, civilization in India began about 4,500 years ago. Many sources describe it as "Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara" — the first and the supreme culture in the world, according to the All World Gayatri Pariwar (AWGP) organization. (<http://www.livescience.com>)

Wyman states that culture plays important part in the society:

"...In an economic climate where we hear so much about crisis in health and education, it is important to remember that culture, too, is an essential element of a healthy society. It's not an either-or situation. Health is necessary for life; culture makes life worth living...." (<http://www.enugustatetourismboard.com>)

Tourism means a visit by an outsider to host culture and making an attempt to learn about the host culture through festivals, arts and crafts, sculpture and architecture, etc. There has been a lot of debate, of late, over increasing importance of cultural tourism as a showcase to the local culture by outsider tourists. Macintosh and Goeldner define tourism as “A collection of activities, services and industries which deliver a travel experience comprising transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment businesses and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups travelling away from home”. (www.tour.teithe.gr/get_file.php?f=388 Heritage Tourism & Museum Management 2011-2012 / Lesson 2)

This means tourism has diversified into economic and cultural activities and has become a key source of socio-economic progress of the region. It is also an exercise into building national image among

international group and that of the community within the nation. Cultural tourism brings together the arts, heritage and special character of a place through travel. Cultural tourism is also a form of tourism whose purpose is to discover heritage sites and cultural monuments while travelling. But why is cultural tourism necessary? It is because cultural tourism “relates to those individual groups of people who travel round the world, individual country, local community and individual events that seek to experience a heritage, religious and arts sites to develop knowledge of different communities’ way of life. It can include performing arts, festivals, and visit to historic sites and monuments, education tours, museums, national heritage sites and religious sites”. (<http://www.culturematters.ca>)

According to UNESCO, there are certain factors which are responsible for the increase in cultural tourism. Some of them are:

- Culture as source of identity;
- Increase in cultural consciousness due to education;
- Increase in tourism mind set;
- A desire for direct forms of experience;
- Easier access because of increase in mobility;
- Easy accessibility of information on culture and tourism through new technologies; and
- Earnest desire to establish distinct identity of region and nation.

(UNESCO: The Impact of Culture on Tourism)

All this have resulted in viewing culture as an aspect of tourism products.

Gujarat does no leg behind celebrating various festivals round the year. Some of them are:

- International Kite Festival, Ahmedabad, 11-15 Jan
- Kankaria-Carnival, Ahmedabad, 25-31 Dec
- Global Navratri, Oct –Nov
- Tarnetar Fair, Tarnetar, Aug
- Mango Festival, Gir, June
- Saputara Monsoon Festival, Saputara, Aug-Sep
- Modhera Dance Festival, Modhera, Jan 3rd week
- Rann Utsav, Kutchchh, Dec –Feb

One of the significant factors responsible for the success in these festivals is the branding initiative which has ‘Khushboo Gujarat Ki’ campaign by Mr. Amitabh Bachchan.

The present paper focuses on viewing Rann Utsav as an important cultural tourism destination. Rann Utsav is celebrated at a place called Dhorado in Kutchchh district. Dhorado is a seasonal salt marsh land situated in the middle of the Thar Desert. This desert is one of the largest salt deserts in the world consisting of the Great Rann of Kutchchh, the Little Rann of Kutchchh and Banni grasslands. This region has an ancient connection as excavation has revealed human existence since the time of Indus Valley Civilization. Once upon a time a lot of seafaring and foreign trade used to happen from the shores of the Gulf of Kutchchh. Thus, the Kutchchh region has a lot of historical significance connecting to ancient

Indian Culture. It is obvious for the tourist to get attracted to this glorious place. And hence Rann Utsav is an important cultural tourist destination in the world.

Rann Utsav has started in 2005 and is celebrated from every full moon day in November / December and lasts for more than two months. Tourist visits this place to experience the diverse traditions and the generosity and hospitality of Kutchchh. The main attraction is the White Desert. A grand tent city having about 300 tents is set up at Dhorado, 85 km from Bhuj. The experience of Snow White desert gleaming like silver on moonlit night intoxicates a person. Together with White Desert a test of Kutchchhi art, culture and literature also attracts the visitors.

The popularity of Rann Utsav has been drawing in travelers from all over the world. There has been increase in number of tourists seven times with the ratio of 46.27 percent every year in last half a decade. Approximate 8 lakh people have visited the White Desert in last five years. 48,100 tourists visited the Rann Utsav in 2010-11, while 3 lakh 22 thousand tourists visited the place in 2014-15. (Gujarat. Government of Gujarat.)

Rann Utsav has following attractions.

- Camel Cart Ride
- Shopping Activity Area Bandhini Sarees , Handraft Items & many more traditional items.
- Kids Zone Area
- Food Court
- Gaming Zone
- Spa Centre on chargeable basis
- Yoga & Meditation Centre
- Adventurous Activity on Chargeable basis Parasailing, Dirt Biking.
- Cultural Dance Performance
- Live Music Concerts
- Special Cultural Dance Shows, Garba, Dandiya Raas
- Conference hall for Business purpose
- Rides on chargeable basis
- Optional Tours Visit on Chargeable Indo Pak Border, Mandavi Beach
- Sightseeing Visit Kaladungar / Black Hill, White Rann / Desert, Hodka Village
- Library

However, the White desert is not the only tourist attraction. Very well known saying are that 'munjo kachchhadoo bare maas' and also 'Kutchchh nahidekha to kuchh nahi dekha'. The city of Bhuj is very beautiful and strategically located. It is having Aina Mahal, Hamirsar Lake, Vijay Vilas Palace, Rukmavati River, Kashi Vishwanath temple, Swaminarayan temple, Ram kund step well and Shyamji Krishna verma memorial. Dholavira is one of the Harrappa cities at the Khadir Bet Island. This Island is also known as Kotada Timba. Near Nalia is located the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, spread over two sq km area. The Little Rann of Kutchchh has the Wild Ass Sanctuary. One can also see Desert Fox, Blue Bull, Blackbuck, Wolf, Jackal and water birds like cranes, ducks, pelicans, flamingos, sand grouse, francolins and the Indian bustards. There is also Marine National Park having great diversity of habitats,

coral reefs and mangroves. On the seashore in Kutchchh is the beautiful town Mandvi famous for beaches, camel and horse rides, windmills and film shooting location. The temple of Vishnu adds to the beauty of Narayan Sarovar, one of the most five sacred lakes according to Hindu customs. In Bhadrawati is located one of the most ancient Jain temples, Bhadreswar Jain Temple. Sea trade is carried out from Kandla and Mundra ports. Jesai-Toral shrine is an important monument at Anjar. About 250 km from Bhuj, situated in Lakhpat taluka on the western tip of India is an ancient Lord Shiv temple connecting the story of Ravana. This temple is also known as Kotilingeshwar temple. The famous Ashapura mata temple, built in 14th century by Ajo and Angor, the karad vanias. It is also known as matano madh. This temple is 58 ft long, 32ft wide and 52ft tall. 400 year old Duttatreya temple is situated on the top of Black Hill or Kala Dungar. This is very close to Indo-Pak border. Bunni Grasslands Reserve is unique grassland spread over 3847 sq km. This is full of rich wild life and biodiversity. This grassland is the protected land.

Apart from various places of visits, Kutchchh is also known as a cradle of craftsmanship as the reflections of the Harappan civilization is found in the culture of Kutchchh. One can witness weaving, block printing, bandhini tie and dye, rogan painting, embroidery, pottery, wood carving, metal crafts, shell work and other handicrafts. Kutchchh is known for mirrored embroidery, celebrating festivity, honouring deities prepared by village women. Block printing like Ajarakh print, Batic print and rogan printing are well known hand printing industries. Only eight artisans of Rogan are living today. They have established Limca Book of World record. They are awarded with various national and international awards. Tourists from all over the world including USA, UK, China, Japan, Europe etc. flock here to appreciate their art and also buy from them.

Artisans living in Bumaro and Ludia villages are expert in wood carving. They use teak wood and local bahuv wood to make utensils like pastel roller, bottles, small table etc. Clay is mixed with camel dung to prepare peacock, parrot, fingers, vinjno(fan) etc are prepared sometimes even in three dimensions. Kutchchh is also known for silver work. Artists prepare pen knives, nutcrackers and iron bell with copper coating etc. Portraits of birds, animals, plants, agarbatti stand, figures of Gods and Goddesses are prepared by seashells.

In terms of music, this region is known for folk and sufi songs. Local musical instruments Morchay, Manjira, Rava, Bhorringo, Jodia-Pava.

The economy of this area too is busted by the rise of cultural tourism and people get to know Kutchchhi sanskriti through this. In view of Stiernstrand (1996), the economic impact of tourism arises principally from the consumption of tourism products in a geographical area. According to McDonnell, Allen and O'Toole (1999), tourism related services, which include travel, accommodation, restaurants, shopping are the major beneficiaries of the event. (<http://www.enugustatetourismboard.com>)

According to Lou Harris Poll, the economic realities of last two decades had caused a shift from escapism to enrichment. In 1990s, 88% travelers opined that their aim was to understand culture, as compared to 48% in 1980s. Whereas cultural, historical or archaeological treasures were important to 50% travelers in 1990, as compared to 27% in 1980s. This reflects dramatically increased importance of culture as a travel motivator. (<http://www.lord.ca>)

- 1) There are eight benefits of conducting an economic impact analysis on festivals and events
 - Demonstrates good stewardship of public funds
 - Helps justify financial support from local governments, donors, and sponsors
 - Proves return on investment
 - Can help attract valuable sponsorships
 - Provides bench marking to track future growth
 - Helps pave the way for expanding the event
 - Gets your partners and local businesses more invested by showing how they benefit
 - Can gain market research (demographic, event marketing, and product development) information from event attendees (<http://sarahtpage.com/>)

How can Rann Utsav help benefit the economy of the area? It can, in the following attributes:

Accommodation; Transportation; Entertainment; Attractions; Industries – Hospitality; Food & Beverage Services; Retail Trade; Transportation Services; Cultural, sports and recreational services; Recreation; Clothing; Housing; Household goods

All these together has converted Rann Utsav and there by Kutchchh as an important tourist destination marking its place among important places of cultural tourism. However, as the British professor has undertaken extensive research on the Banni region in Kutchchh, realizing it as the fast vanishing culture and tried to preserve it through paintings and photographs, we also must become conscious towards preserving our precious own culture. Such an insight shall help us develop out cultural tourism rapidly.

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