

# Khajuraho tourism: issues and impacts



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India is famous for its great ethnicity and diversity among the cultures and these two main elements reflect in the level of tourism development in any region of the country. Apparently this has led the government and other respective authorities of tourism to call out the importance of heritage tourism in this 21st century. This report is based on the issues and impacts of tourism in Khajuraho, a UNESCO listed world heritage site, famous for its exotic sculptured temples.

Khajuraho is located in a central state of India, and one of the oldest heritage sites in the world. The temples were built a thousand years ago and still they stand dazzling with all the ancient glory. The tourism development in the area has changed many features of the destination and there has been some issues regarding the level of tourism. The place was found only in the early decades of 20th century and even from that time Khajuraho still took so many decades to be printed in the world famous heritage sites. The basic aim of this report is to identify the tourism developments and impacts of tourism in the selected tourism site and it is structured by beginning with a concise glimpse about the destination and followed by explaining the tourism developments in the area, discussing the influences of tourism and its impacts among locals and suggestions to improve the practice of tourism followed by a conclusion which will sum up the overall report and research conducted.

## **Background of the study**

India is a large nation with huge number of population and great numbers of both cultural and heritage spots. This exclusivity has made the county, a world famous tourism destination in the global tourism map and regarded as

a country, famous for its great cultural diversity. Many of these heritage sites are secured by UNESCO- and are still striving to find a place in their destination list.

Ethnicity and diversity are the two main key elements of Indian cultural Heritage tourism, and it is really difficult to focus on the whole country's tourism development and the impacts being facing currently. To understand the effects of tourism on culture, environment and economy it was therefore, I decided that this study should look further deep into the heart of the country's heritage spots which are commonly unknown for its own nationalists but relatively known by other parts of the world. Khajuraho, a world heritage tourism site in the Central Indian State of Madhya Pradesh was chosen and examined to articulate the nature and dimensions of some of the common issues from the impacts of local and international tourism.

The study materials used mainly are reliable sources from the internet and also referred to the theories used in the tourism industry by linking to some of the case studies conducted in the subjected destination. Moreover some parts of the report will be reflecting from my personal experience in the destination. The facts and figures received from the Indian government tourism website back up and gives an overall glimpse of the importance of international tourism occurring in that place.

### **Khajuraho: A mirror of Indian Heritage**

Khajuraho, a Central Indian State of Madhya Pradesh is world famous for its UNESCO recognized heritage sites and practices great heritage tourism. The site is well known for its imposing temples by reflecting the beauty of

antique sculptures and structures carved in huge single sand stones (<http://www.mptourism.com/dest/khajuraho.html>). These temples, mirroring the sensuous images of both men and women also lead to shed some lights on the medieval Hindu and Jain cultures

**Pic1-Khajuraho Temple**The history of temples in Khajuraho village is believed to be dated back to a thousand years ago, erected by the great Chandela Rajput Dynasty of Central India, by taking a century to build more than 85 glorious temples with richly carved unique and magnificent sculptures. (Gill, 2008). During the depredation of time only 22 are managed to survive and they stand still calling out the glory of medieval architectural masters. Some of the temples are sculptured with enticing erotic structures representing the Tantric Vedas which the people in the village used to practice.

## **Area**

16. 93 sq. km.

## **Altitude**

257 m above Sea Level

## **Temperature**

Summer: Max 47°C, Min 21°C.

Winter: Max 32°C, Min 4°C.

## **Rainfall**

114 cms annual

## Languages

English, Hindi.

Table1-General InformationThe other Tourism activities include Khajuraho Dance Festival, organized every year in the month of February or March for one week and the Daily Sound & Light Show ((Khajuraho, n. d.). Table-1 shows some general Information about Khajuraho ([http://www. delhitourism. com/khajuraho-tourism/](http://www.delhitourism.com/khajuraho-tourism/))

## Level of tourism development

Pic2-LocationEver since the airport is opened, a daily flight operated from Delhi, the capital city of India connected Khajuraho with some other famous destinations. These made the visitors to reach there without any inconvenience and also the ground transportation facilities improved, while connecting to nearby important towns and railway station by running daily trips to Khajuraho. The main significant changes in the level of tourism happened was “ the creation of a Master Plan to guide the growth of Khajuraho and the institution of the Khajuraho Dance Festival, a successful event that has, to some extent given Khajuraho a ‘ classical’ image” (Menon, 1993). D: ACADEMIC6th SemesterTOUR310reportkhajuraho-map. jpg

## What was Khajuraho before

Pic3-SculpturesKhajuraho or the ancient name ‘ Khajurapura’ is believed to be derived from the word ‘ Khajurvahila’ meaning the ‘ garden of dates’ surrounded the village at that time (Krishnamurthy, 1996). Deserted after the 14th century, the area was completely unknown to outside world until it was discovered by a young British Army officer T. S. Burt in 1838 (Menon,

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1993). According the Ministry of Tourism, (<http://www.mptourism.com/dest/khajuraho.html>) after the turn down of the Chandela dynasty in the 13th century, the temples were hidden from outside world by dense forests and shrubs around. Nobody knew the epitome of Indian Architecture was diminishing dawdling in the rampage of time. Many of the structures were destroyed by weather, the slackness and laxity of surrounding world. But this hidden identity must have saved the remaining temples from the early Muslim invasions in the past (Hegewald & Mitra, 2008). According to Menon (1993) the temples were unknown to the world until 1950's and it was only the foreign journalists and photographers who published the photos to the open world. The place was opened to the tourists only a few decades after the Independence of India from British in 1947 after building adequate facilities for transportation to get there.

### **Changes after the tourism developments**

Today, Khajuraho is a booming tourist spot for both domestic and international travelers. The infrastructure is modified significantly by the government to the needs of thirsting travelers, as

the years pass by. According to (UNESCO, 2005) few modest hotels were built in the early sixties to attract foreigners and domestic tourists and the number of people coming to visit Khajuraho has changed dramatically ever since the airport was built as the surface transportation was not convenient enough. The 'draft Development Plan' produced by Indian Government in 1975 is also guided consequent development of the area (Menon, 1993). Now the old village of Khajuraho is changed absolutely into a place with a number of 8 star hotels including 2 five star chains affiliated hotels and other

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budgeted hotels also, in an area of just few kilometers (<http://www.tourism-of-india.com/hotels-in-madhya-pradesh.html>) equipped with efficient roads access, other transportation and accommodation facilities. Subsequently areas around Khajuraho have also flourished and harvested the benefits from these tourism developments.

## **Tourist profile**

There have been a lot of changes happened during the last few decades and this has led to have a significant change in the demographics of travelers arriving in Khajuraho. Menon (1993) stated that a few decades back, the foreign tourists visiting Khajuraho comprised 3.3% of total number of visitors to India and 'most of the tourists were independent and included in low budget category, half of the group tourists who visited India visited Khajuraho also'.

Table2-Statistics from 1984-1992  
The statistics published by the government a few years back, shows the tremendous hike in the number of tourists visited the destination and it gives a lucid idea about the expansion of the Khajuraho tourism plans (Menon, 1993)

Table3-Statistics from 2004-2006

The number of people visited in the early 80's were higher than in early 90's in the domestic travelers as it is believed to be the reason of political instability at that time. But the number of foreign travelers remained constant between these periods. Table 2 shows that total numbers of tourists in 1985-1986 were around 203, 646, but in the early 90's it was decreased to 151, 350. (Appendix I-IV)  
There is a significant percentage of increase in the <https://assignbuster.com/khajuraho-tourism-issues-and-impacts/>

number of foreign visitors to Khajuraho in the current decade almost double the numbers in previous decades while the number of domestic tourists remained constant apparently. This increasing number of tourists mainly depends on the level of promotions of the destination or and the transportation facilities.

### **Driving force**

It is not only just some sandstone structures to see in Khajuraho, but it is the picturesque depiction of medieval existence of village people ruled under the great 'Chandela' kings portrayed by the maestros of stone architecture about a millennium ago. It is the thrusting force of quaint beauty to lead the travelers to Khajuraho from around the world. The main motivation of travelling to Khajuraho is the splendor of these sculptures in the temples. The government tourism board and other tourism agencies have recognized the demand for tourism in the region and offer various tourism packages including the nearby cities of Khajuraho. It is another value added benefit for the travelers and a motive to visit Khajuraho. Although it is an icon of Heritage Tourism, the erotic sculptures, illustrating the 'tantric' arts in the sandstones attract many of the tourists from around the world.

### **Rise in the economy- A positive impact**

Though there are many identified impacts of tourism in Khajuraho, the most significant one is the rise in the total economy, as the level of tourism in the destination parts a major share in the total number of foreign tourist flow into the country (Appendix V)



As a result of tourism development programs which eventually offered more than 3, 000 job offers to the local community made the status of lifestyle to go up resourcefully as there was significant growth in education and health care systems. The other noticed results are in the local handicraft industry and the offering of large scale indirect employment in other sectors especially in the farming (UNESCO, 2005). The development of tourism in the region have also reduced the level of poverty than the neighboring villages as this mass tourism has helped the local people to indulge in increasing their personal income through various tourism activities. All those improvements in the public utility infrastructures and transport infrastructures in Khajuraho show the positive economical impacts and it has been forecasted to make a dramatic change in the future number of tourists (In 2015, expecting 1, 00, 965 domestic tourists and 8, 59, 701 foreign tourists with a total number of 19, 60, 666) Appendix-VI

### **Negative economic impact**

The level of tourism has made some negative impacts in the local economy to a certain level, especially the development programs by the government which brought many outsiders into the village economy. Instead of using the natural resources, things are being imported from outside by the migrants. Most of the imported goods are manipulated as local art work and being sold to the tourists which is a leakage in the integration of locals and the government systems (Menon, 1993). Moreover, the inflation has increased due to the less supply for the high demand for local items caused by the tourism development program. According to Menon, (1993, p. 37) “ a local

guide explains that 20 years ago people were friendlier and close together: tourism, he said, has made the people money-minded”.

### **Positive Environmental impact**

The wild shrouded temples are titivated by the government by the level of tourism in Khajuraho. According to UNESCO, (2005) the place is now equipped with complete infrastructure including transportation, electricity, water supply, hotels and hospitals. The temples are now protected by the Indian Central Government with the help of archeological and tourism departments to preserve the Indian heritage, as they are wall protected by the security systems in order to avoid intruders and vandalisms. Now the temples are surrounded by gardens which are not truly, a part of original temple designs, to enhance the beauty of temple premises. Apart from that, a central museum is located in the village to keep the valuable broken parts from the temples and show case the ancient artwork to the visitors and the excavation areas are restricted for public . One can clearly see that the old sleepy image of Khajuraho is completely changed by the changes happened in the environment due to the tourism (Menon, 1993).

### **Negative Environmental impact**

Due to the characteristics of the destination, Khajuraho poses very less detrimental effect on the physical environment as the tourists who visit are particular nature of sightseer activity and their primary intention is just to see the sculptures in the temples (Menon, 1993). Thus rate of losing the natural resources will be very less in the region comparing some other tourist destinations, however the mass amount of tourist flow into Khajuraho must have changed the environment negatively due to the air pollution and <https://assignbuster.com/khajuraho-tourism-issues-and-impacts/>

solid wastes disposal. Moreover the destruction of unique flora and fauna in the area, due to the excavation work happening nearby the temples reduced the wild life in the surrounding region. The other considerable negative impacts are the air pollution caused by the aircrafts flying. A study conducted by Indian central archaeological department found out that aircrafts flying over the temples produce a certain level of vibrations which could damage ancient monuments(Archaeological Survey of India, n. d) According to a monthly social awareness magazine (Khajuraho Special, 2004) land pollution and air pollution are some of the major environmental issues in Khajuraho faced by tourism. None of the hotels in Khajuraho have proper waste management system or recycling system which persuade them to litter openly and so do the tourists, especially the canned foods and other disposable items. In the same way, increasing number in tourism has caused the same number in vehicles for transportation which pollutes the air by emitting dangerous gases and causing to change the atmospheric temperature. The final thought is about the shrinking of water bodies in the area, where the improper land usage reduced the natural water resources drastically.

### **Positive socio-cultural impact**

The lifestyle in Khajuraho is being affected by tourism activities as a natural consequence of socio-cultural impact. People have been more aware of the tourism needs and other cultures, to mingle with other nationalities flawlessly. The dance festivals and other cultural activities unite the local community and also portray the true image of Khajuraho to tourists. It has been proved that there hasn't been any complaint of sexual harassment or

prostitution, which shows that the local community is more responsive about social norms (Menon, 1993) and some of the local people have managed to make marriage relationship with foreigners. After all, some of the local community still indulge in their daily prayers and go to the temples for worshipping which point towards the conscientious tourism in the area.

### **Negative socio-cultural impact**

The migration and settlement of outsiders have changed Khajuraho social and cultural environment, as now the local populations is consisting of various ethnic groups who drifted to make business via tourism. The local language spoken is very less in Khajuraho as majority of people living in Khajuraho are nonnative. From my personal experience in Khajuraho, what I could see mainly was the children and young people are following the path of tourism to make money easily rather than going to schools and colleges. Most of them are grabbed by travel agents to become guides and receive commission from them. Ultimately tourism has brought in these multi cultural societies who sell the true art for money into Khajuraho and broken the integrity of local culture.

### **Recommendations and final thoughts**

“ The promotional material and the information available to the tourists, reduce Khajuraho to a single-issue destination” Menon (1993). This image of Khajuraho is more likely a single point destination where the tourism is only focused on the sensual sculptures in the temples. Instead of publicizing the true illustration, the tourists are falsified by the travel agent mafias which make them to take pleasure in the erotic part of the heritage art worked temples instead of understanding the true principles of an ancient civilization

existed there. Hence the government should be more responsible to stop these misleading by establishing examples such as providing proper tourism marketing campaigns, awareness seminars and cultured guiding system. Instead of focusing only on the temples, tourism board should take hand in developing the vicinity and neighboring locality as they are still under poverty and the wildlife around Khajuraho still remains unguarded though it is reserved.

“ Over the past years Asian countries have on looked incredible social, cultural, political and technological changes” (Pandey, Chettri, Kunwar and Ghimire, 1995). These significant changes have been received by the far-fetched development of tourism in the subjected countries. Despite the fact that tourism fosters the national economy to a certain extent, it has definite impacts on country’s enlightening ethnicity and legacy while leaving the natural possessions to an economic item of trade for income. According to Bandyopadhyay, Morais, Chick (2008, p. 791), “ Tourism is not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs.” It is apparent from this report that, these factors have certainly affected either positively or negatively on the values of economic, environmental and socio cultural in Khajuraho. The final say is tourism in Khajuraho has fostered over the years and it has changed many factors, it is the obligation of each and every single tourist who comes to visit Khajuraho to practice ‘ responsible tourism’ while mesmerized by the prehistoric sandstone shades of ancient arts.