

A Study of the Viability and Sustainability of Heritage Tourism with respect to Historic Residential Houses in Kolkata

Abstract

Heritage tourism is being revered throughout the world for its contribution to effectuate Sustainable Development Goals, 2030 and protect heritage buildings against rising pressures of urbanization. Among various forms of heritage, residential heritage is a category that is exposed to high risks of demolition. The thesis thereby underscores the significance of residential historic houses (HHs) in promoting heritage tourism and establishing a complementary relationship with it. The study is based on Kolkata, the erstwhile British capital situated on the banks of River Ganga that attracted globe-trotting merchant-adventurers and gradually became the seat of the Bengal Renaissance. With extant literature focusing on heritage tourism, tourist satisfaction and plight of heritage in the city, the thesis studies the present condition of enlisted HHs under the KMC Act 1980 through structured questionnaire survey and interview of experts in the field of heritage conservation, field visit to selected HHs and insights from the stakeholders.

The HHs are initially screened and scored on the basis of cultural value, experiential value and product value to estimate their tourism potential to create a list of HHs suitable for heritage tourism. These are then classified on the basis of certain commonalities into three categories of Rajbari, Thakurdalan and Historical event related houses to form theme-based plans that can stimulate tourism. Based on the scores, the classification and accessibility, a judgmental sample of ten houses was used to conduct a field study. The field study included a visit to the house, photography of the building, interiors and premises, interaction with the stakeholders wherever possible and an examination of the neighborhood. The collection of photographs were then coded and analyzed on the QDA software Atlas.ti. Network analysis of these photographs yielded visualizations of six problem areas: hindrance to tourism appeal, lack of maintenance, cleanliness, lack of facilities, incompatible changes and incompatible usage. Three cases were then selected and their stakeholders were interviewed. They revealed that the lack of apathy of the government, absence of incentives and benefits coupled with inflation has made maintenance of the property difficult, but they were keen to learn about new avenues and adequate modus operandi for it. Lastly, the survey responses were utilized to comprehend the validity of HHs in maintaining the heritage character of the city, promoting tourism and generating revenue. The data was statistically analyzed in SPSS through binary logistic regression. It was possible to recognize that to maintain these HHs, incentives from the government, creation of a Heritage Fund, amendments in the tenancy laws with strict penalties is required at the government level. Avenues to reduce material costs of restoration to induce regular maintenance are required. The HHs are valid to develop and promote heritage tourism but they need to be adaptively reused in the form of accommodations and museums. Experiential events, heritage walks and festivals should be employed to make these HHs come to live. And the government should take care of the visual appeal by restricting unwanted constructions, overshadowing hoardings and incompatible usage. Lastly, the suitable sources to raise revenue were also identified to help sustain the heritage houses. For example, multiple sources of revenue can be earned through museums in the form of entrance fees, lease rentals, sale of merchandise and donations.

The study concludes that HHs are an integral element in upholding the heritage character of the city and can contribute to theme-based heritage tourism development. But the government needs to provide subsidies, incentives, facility of Transfer of Development Right, create a Heritage Fund to finance heritage related expenses, utilize CSR funds etc.

Keywords: Heritage Tourism, Residential Heritage, Historic Houses, Conservation, Finance

Puja Bhowmik
[PUJA BHOWMIK]
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