

Empowering Indigenous Communities through Sustainable Tourism: A Policy Analysis of the Vagad Circuit in Southern Rajasthan

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Abstract: Tourism serves as a paramount catalyst for socio-economic transformation, expanding beyond conventional urban heritage corridors into rural, ecocentric, and indigenous spaces. Within India's overarching development framework (Viksit Bharat Abhiyan), capitalising on regional multiculturalism is critical to establishing the nation as a global cultural epicentre.

This paper examines the role of indigenous tribal heritage in driving sustainable tourism in the lesser-explored Vagad Circuit of Southern Rajasthan, encompassing the districts of Dungarpur, Banswara, and Pratapgarh. It analyses the socio-historical dynamics of the regional Bhil and Meena tribes, evaluates their historically symbiotic relationship with Rajput dynasties, and outlines their intangible cultural assets.

Utilizing secondary data—specifically the Rajasthan Tourism Policy 2020 and the Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme 2022—and regional historical records, this study evaluates the visible integration of royal and tribal heritage. It contextualizes the built monuments (such as Juna Mahal and the Arthuna Group of Temples) alongside intangible traditions (such as the Gair dance and the Baneshwar Tribal Fair).

The study reveals that while the Vagad Circuit is richly endowed with unique ecological biodiversity, ancient archaeological footprints (Ahar-Banas culture), and vibrant tribal customs, its tourism potential remains constrained. Key bottlenecks include critical infrastructure deficits, restricted accessibility, a lack of year-round product diversification, and limited direct community engagement in economic benefits.

To mitigate these challenges, the paper presents a strategic roadmap that emphasizes targeted digital marketing, infrastructure enhancement through tribal sub-plans, and all-weather experiential tourism models (e.g., Ecotourism in the Banswara backwaters). Ultimately, the paper advocates for robust community-led tourism cooperatives that empower local tribes as primary stakeholders, ensuring heritage preservation, preventing rural migration, and fostering equitable socio-economic development. It is high time we embedded tribal heritage into the Viksit Bharat Abhiyan, and we aspire to become a world cultural hub with 5,000 years of heritage at its core, with Rajasthan at its heart.

Keywords: Bhil Culture; Heritage Conservation; Rajasthan Tourism Policy, Sustainable Development; Tribal Tourism; Vagad Circuit;

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INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF TRIBAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Tourism is a vital source of income for many regions and countries. Its importance was recognised in the Manila Declaration on World Tourism of 1980 as, "...an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies and their international relations" (World Tourism Organisation, 1980).

The tourism industry has emerged globally as a significant catalyst for socio-economic development. The travel and tourism industry accounts for 10.4% of the global GDP and supports one in ten jobs worldwide, according to the 2018 World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) report. The WTTC Economic Impact Research report in 2018 forecasted that India would be among the world's fastest-growing tourism economies in the coming years. The travel trade is expected to add approximately 10 million jobs to the economy by 2028 (Choudhary & Yadav, 2018).

Tribal Heritage Tourism (often interchanged with indigenous tourism or ethno-tourism) is a niche segment of the tourism industry in which the primary attraction is immersion in and interaction with the distinct History, living customs, rituals, arts, and landscapes of indigenous tribal communities. In the specific context of Rajasthan, India, Tribal Heritage Tourism is not merely an anthropological excursion; it is a dynamic exploration of how the State's significant tribal populations (which make up roughly 13.48% to 15% of the State's total demographic) historically intersected with royal Rajput kingdoms to shape the geopolitical and cultural fabric of the region.

A tribe is viewed, historically or developmentally, as a social group that existed before the development of, or outside of, centralized states. Many anthropologists use the term "tribal society" to refer to societies organized primarily around kinship, especially groups of corporate descent. Different terms used to describe Indigenous groups globally include:

- Ethnic minorities: China, Vietnam, Philippines
- Tribes: Africa, the Americas
- Hill tribes: Thailand
- Scheduled Tribes, Adivasis, or Vanavasis: India
- Native American, Indian, or Amerindian: North and South America
- Indigenes: Latin America
- Aboriginal / First Nations: Australia, Canada, Taiwan

The United Nations defines Indigenous or tribal communities, peoples, and nations as those having "a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories," are distinct from other settler groups, and want to "preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity." This historical continuity is based on the occupation of ancestral lands, common ancestry, cultural practices, and language. Indigenous people are also economically and culturally marginalised and often live in extreme poverty.

Tribal Heritage tourism showcases rich tribal life, art, culture, and heritage. Tribal tourism enables interaction between tourists and residents, enriching the experience. In his landmark 1975 study, *The Notion of the Tribe*, anthropologist Morton H. Fried provided numerous examples of tribes whose members spoke different languages and practised different rituals, or shared languages and rituals with members of other tribes (Fried, 1975). Similarly, he provided examples of tribes where people followed different political leaders or the same leaders as members of other tribes. He concluded

that fluid boundaries and heterogeneity generally characterise tribes that are dynamic rather than parochially isolated (Fried, 1975).

India has many tribal people who belong to unique social setups. These tribes, residing in different parts of the country, are progressively interacting with the mainstream while safeguarding their distinct cultures. With cultures and traditions distinctly different from others, these communities still occupy pristine horizons. Modern India is home to many indigenous tribes whose lives remain closely tied to their natural surroundings. The tribals in India are pro-environmental communities fighting to protect rivers, lands, and forests, which are the sources of their livelihood. The congruity between local tribes and Nature helps sustain exotic biodiversity.

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF TRIBAL HERITAGE IN INDIA

<i>Region</i>	<i>Key States</i>	<i>Distinctive Cultural and Livelihood Attributes</i>
Western Region	Rajasthan and Gujarat	Vibrant lifestyle deeply integrated with Nature; famous for iconic community-led traditions, bowmanship, and resilient forest preservation practices.
Southern Region	Tamil Nadu and Kerala (e.g., Nilgiri Hills)	Highly specialised artistry and distinct lifestyle practices, exemplified by the complex pastoral customs and unique embroidery work of the Toda tribe.
Central Region	Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha (e.g., Bastar)	Home to some of the country's oldest indigenous clans, such as the Santhals, and renowned for extraordinary lost-wax metal castings (Dhokra art).
North-Eastern Region	Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh	Characterized by diverse oral folklore, vibrant hand-woven textiles, intricate bamboo/cane craftsmanship, and distinct community-led nature festivals.

Indigenous tribal tourist attractions include museums, cultural villages, nature-based tours, indigenous fairs, festivals, events, and art galleries. The artistic, environmental, and spiritual aspects of Indigenous heritage and traditions are predominantly featured in Indigenous tourism. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development has emphasized the vital role of Indigenous peoples in conserving natural areas and species on their traditional lands. Indigenous people comprise 5% of the world's population but embody 80% of the world's cultural diversity. They are estimated to occupy 20% of the world's land surface, yet nurture 80% of the world's biodiversity on their ancestral lands and territories. However, if not managed within sustainable parameters, tourism can harm communities (Zeppel, 2006).

TRIBES OF RAJASTHAN

Besides Rajput history and culture, Rajasthan is the largest State in India with tribes that form essential segments of society. According to the 2011 Census of India, Scheduled Tribes comprise approximately 13.48% of the State's population. Out of this tribal demographic, the Bhils and Meenas constitute the majority.

The core area of Bhil habitation is the Aravalli hills, which cradle numerous rivers, lakes, and creeks and boast rich biodiversity; 43% of the area is under forest cover. For generations, Bhils have been conserving and managing these forests using their customary skills and knowledge. The tribal communities residing here reveal another side of Royal Mewar, and regional History is incomplete without the contributions of the Bhil communities.

The concept of a "forest dweller" historically overlapping with urban domains is apparent from local toponymy. Bhilwara, now an urban industrial centre, was historically a forested region with a

large Bhil population, from whom the city derives its name. Banswara, local folklore firmly attributes the founding of Banswara to a Bhil chieftain named Bansia or Wasna (Ojha, 1936). Kushalgarh, the royal symbol of the State of Kushalgarh, prominently features a Bhil warrior on one side and a Rajput on the other.

The Bhils of Mewar primarily reside in the region's deep forests and mountain ranges, where agriculture, poultry farming, hunting, and woodcarving are integral to their way of life. Their traditional medicine relies heavily on local herbs and plants for physical well-being.

To the southwest of the Mewar heartland lies the hilly tract of Chhappan (a habitation historically associated with fifty-six communities); here, the Bhil tribe, the region's predominant group, was among the original inhabitants. The Vagad region was traditionally viewed as possessing many Bhil settlements, alongside other communities classified as 'Scheduled Tribes' by the Government of India's 1950 list (revised in 1976), such as the Meena, Garasia, Bhil-Mina, Sahariya, and Damor. The Bhils comprise several clans and lineages, including the Barda, Vasava, and Bhil Mavchi. Scholars explain the political and cultural interactions and relationships between Rajput kingdoms and tribal populations in various ways (Hooja, 2006).

As historical chroniclers point out, the Bhils made brief appearances on the stage of Indian History, only to retreat into anonymity. Their story is one of fluctuating fortunes, great territorial power, intense vitality, and eventual subjugation. They are our living link with the past that cannot be recaptured. The Bhils not only shaped events in the region they once controlled, but they also played a decisive role in the destiny of many rulers and kingdoms" (Tod, 1832).

TRIBAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN RAJASTHAN

The definitions and framework of this sector in Rajasthan can be broken down into three distinct dimensions. **The Policy and Statutory Definition-** According to the Rajasthan Tourism Policy 2020 and the Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme 2022, the state government legally operationalizes tribal tourism by focusing on geography, livelihood, and infrastructure:

Geographic & Infrastructural Framework- The policy identifies core tribal sub-plan areas—primarily concentrated within the Vagad Circuit (Dungarpur, Banswara, Pratapgarh) and the southern Aravalli tracts—to inject direct development funds into pristine zones.

Sustainable Economic Catalyst- As outlined in regional development studies, sustainable tribal tourism in Rajasthan is legally and economically structured to act as a multiplier, recycling tourist revenue back into local indigenous communities to minimise urban migration and generate rural self-employment.

CORE ELEMENTS OF RAJASTHAN'S TRIBAL TOURISM

<i>Component</i>	<i>Manifestation in Rajasthan</i>
Festivals & Fairs	• The Baneshwar Tribal Fair (Dungarpur) • Tribal Holi celebrations with local clans
Performing Folk Arts	• Gair Dance (energetic concentric stick dance) • Ghoomar and traditional tribal music rhythms
Material Crafts	• Indigenous silver filigree jewellery and pottery • Traditional bow-and-arrow making craft
Ecological Wisdom	• Agroforestry, medicinal plant tracking • Deep-rooted conservation beliefs (sacred groves)

THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL DEFINITION (THE "ROYAL-TRIBAL" SYMBIOSIS)

The tribal heritage of Rajasthan is an indispensable part of the State's socio-cultural tapestry, accounting for approximately 13.48% of its population. Far from being peripheral, the indigenous tribes of Rajasthan have deeply influenced its History, political sovereignty, military strategy, and folk traditions. The socio-political History of Southern Rajasthan is anchored by a unique, highly cooperative relationship between the ruling Rajput dynasties of Mewar and the indigenous tribal populations, most notably the Bhil community. Unlike traditional colonial frameworks of indigenous subjugation, the relations between the Mewar State and the Aravalli hill tribes were defined by mutual diplomatic treaties, ritual validation of royal sovereignty, and unified military defence strategies.

Unlike many global models of indigenous tourism, in which native tribes exist entirely marginalized or distinct from the ruling historical class, Rajasthan's tribal heritage is uniquely defined by its interwoven historical alliance with royalty. Co-Guards of Sovereignty- This is epitomised by the historical dependency of the Mewar/Vagad kings on the Bhil warriors (traditionally hailed as the bowmen of Rajasthan). This interaction defines the "heritage" aspect through symbols such as the Mewar Coat of Arms (featuring a Rajput and a Bhil standing side by side) and historic coronation rituals (*Rajyabhishek*). Therefore, the definition in Rajasthan inherently encompasses feudal History, military alliance, and shared territorial defence, providing a deep historical narrative for tourists that goes beyond just watching a performance—the Intangible and Living Heritage Components. In practice, Tribal Heritage Tourism in Rajasthan is defined by specific experiential and cultural hallmarks that allow travellers to move away from typical "fort and palace" itineraries into lived experiences.

An analytical exploration of Rajasthan's primary tribes—the Bhils, Meenas, and secondary groups such as the Garasias and Sahariyas—reveals a rich living heritage, documented extensively across foundational historical texts and modern anthropological literature.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAMEWORK & THE "ROYAL-TRIBAL" ALLIANCE

A foundational theme in the historiography of Rajasthan is the political, military, and ritualistic relationship between indigenous tribes and ruling Rajput dynasties.

- **The Royal Anointment Ritual:** Colonel James Tod, in his landmark work *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, meticulously recorded that the sovereign legitimacy of the Sisodia rulers of Mewar historically required a coronation ritual (*Rajyabhishek*) involving a Bhil chieftain. A Bhil landholder from Oguna or Undri would draw blood from his own thumb to apply the *tika* to the new Rajput ruler's forehead. This tradition serves as historical evidence of a mutual treaty recognizing tribal autonomy and ancestral land rights.
- **Heraldry and Defence:** This historic coalition is immortalised in the Coat of Arms of the House of Mewar, which depicts a Rajput warrior on one side and a Bhil warrior on the other, both guarding the State's territory. Historians such as Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha emphasize that the guerrilla warfare and tactical archery skills of the local Bhil population physically sustained Mewar's independence under the leadership of icons like Maharana Pratap.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROFILE OF MAJOR TRIBES

A. The Bhil Tribe: Sovereignty and Ecological Stewardship

The Bhils (traditionally derived from *billu*, meaning "bow") are acknowledged as some of the oldest indigenous inhabitants of the Aravalli mountain ranges.

- **Material Culture and Change:** In *Tribal Culture, Continuity, and Change: A Study of Bhils in Rajasthan*, anthropologist Anita Srivastava Majhi examines how the Bhil material culture has adapted over time while staunchly retaining its core customary structures. The Bhils have traditionally acted as ecological guardians of local forests, relying on indigenous agroforestry and herbal medicine for their livelihoods.
- **Toponymy:** Their vast historical geography is woven into modern urban names. For example, Bhilwara was named after the high concentration of Bhil habitations that historically managed the dense, forested region.

B. The Meena Tribe: Sacred Foundations and Transition

The Meenas constitute the largest tribal group in Rajasthan and claim a mythological descent from the *Matsya Avatar* (the fish incarnation) of Lord Vishnu.

- **Socio-Cultural Customs:** Anthropological studies published in the *International Journal of Economic, Business, and Advanced Studies (IJEBAS)* classify the Meena community as traditionally endogamous, with sharp socio-cultural boundaries.
- **Historical Classifications:** Historically, the Meenas were divided into the *Zamindar Meenas* (agriculturalists/landowners) and the *Chowkidar Meenas* (warriors/watchmen who guarded state treasuries and forts). While they have undergone rapid educational and urban transitions compared to other tribes, their rural villages (such as those analyzed in Dausa and Jaipur districts) retain vibrant traditional lineage structures and localized deities.

Military Collaboration and Geopolitical Defense

The physical survival and independence of the Mewar state against intense external threats—including imperial expansions from the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire—depended directly on tribal military collaboration.

Guerrilla Warfare: The deep mountain ranges and dense forests of the Aravalli hills served as a natural defensive fortress. The Bhil communities drew on their intimate knowledge of this topography and their traditional skills as archers to mount effective guerrilla resistance campaigns.

The Mewar Crest: This joint military sacrifice is explicitly immortalized in the official Coat of Arms of the House of Mewar. The State's heraldic crest symmetrically features a Rajput warrior on one side and a Bhil warrior on the other, jointly guarding the central territory. This high position of institutional regard illustrates that the History of Royal Mewar is entirely incomplete without incorporating the contributions and loyalty of the Bhil communities.

Socio-Cultural Integration and Shared Ethics: The integration between the forest domains (*aranya*) and the urban capital centres (*nagara*) of Mewar was historically fluid, creating a shared cultural ethos.

THEME BOUNDARIES OF RAJPUT-TRIBAL INTERACTION

<i>Interactive Channel</i>	<i>Socio-Political Manifestation in Mewar</i>
Toponymy and Geography	• Urban and industrial hubs like Bhilwara were named directly after historic Bhil populations who managed the original forested regions. - Strategic gateway towns like Banswara preserve historical narratives linking their founding to indigenous tribal chiefs.

Shared Defensive Motto	The Bhils historically exemplified the core Mewar state motto: "<i>Jo Dridh rakkhe dharmko, tahhi rakkhe kartaar</i>" (God protects he who defends Dharma). Tribal archers formed the backbone of the State's rugged rear-guard defense during major imperial invasions.
Mutual Adaptation	Rajput kingdoms recognized and protected tribal land autonomy and resource rights. Tribal groups incorporated broad regional values into their customs while maintaining their distinct clan structures.
Ritual Cohesion	The symbolic <i>Blood Tika</i> ceremony required Bhil leadership to validate the ascending Rajput king's authority. Symmetrical representation of a Rajput and a Bhil warrior on the state crest institutionalised this mutual dependency.

3. Elements of Intangible Living Heritage

The intangible heritage of Rajasthan's tribes is highly celebratory, expressive, and deeply intertwined with spiritual or environmental phenomena.

Expressions of Tribal Rajasthani Heritage

Category	Key Expression	Manifestation & Cultural Value
Fairs & Sacred Gatherings	Baneshwar Tribal Fair (Dungarpur)	Occurring at the holy confluence of the Som and Mahi rivers, it serves as the cultural "Kumbh" for the regional Bhil community, preserving ancient songs and tribal trade networks.
	Tribal Holi Celebrations	Active across the Vagad Circuit (Banswara); characterized by local clans coming together in traditional attire while wielding ceremonial sticks and shields.
Performing Folk Arts	Gair Dance	An energetic, rhythmic folk dance performed exclusively by tribal men, moving in concentric circles and striking wooden sticks (<i>khandas</i>) to the beat of large <i>dhol</i> s.
	Ghoomar & Folk Idioms	Traditional high-energy steps and twirling, accompanied by indigenous percussion and wind instruments that recount oral historical narratives.
Material Crafts & Artistry	Silver Filigree Jewellery	Intricate, heavy silver ornaments and filigree metal work handcrafted by regional artisans, depicting tribal motifs and traditional ancestral aesthetics.
	Bow-and-Arrow Fabrication	The preservation of ancestral archery weapon-making techniques and the honouring of the historical identity of the Bhils as the classical "bowmen of the Aravallis."
Ecological & Living Wisdom	Sacred Groves (<i>Orans</i>)	Community-protected forest spaces are preserved through deep-rooted religious beliefs, safeguarding local biodiversity and rare medicinal herbs from logging.
	Indigenous Agroforestry	Sustainable cultivation loops leveraging native trees like <i>Khejri</i> and <i>Mahua</i> for food resilience, livestock fodder (<i>loong</i>), and climate adaptability.

TOURISM FRAMEWORK AND POLICIES IN RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan is prominently placed on the global tourism map. The **Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC)**, established on 1 April 1979, was created to systematically develop tourism infrastructure, organize package tours, fairs, and festivals, and run the luxury tourist train, Palace on Wheels, in collaboration with Indian Railways (RTDC, 2021). The tourism map of Rajasthan is divided into **ten tourism circuits** based on the geographical and cultural divisions of the State: the Dhundhad circuit, the Mewar circuit, the Vagad circuit, the Hadoti circuit, the Merwara circuit, the Shekhawati circuit, the Desert circuit, the Mount-Abu circuit, the Mewat circuit and the Godwad

circuit. All circuits are known for their particular type of attraction. Historically, the southeastern part of Rajasthan is known as Vagad or Wagad, referring to less-populated areas with more forests and wild, remote regions.

POLICY MILESTONES

- **1989:** Rajasthan became a pioneer by granting the tourism sector the status of an **industry**, extending capital investment subsidies by 1993.
- **2001:** The launch of the first formal **Tourism Policy of Rajasthan**, providing a structured roadmap to attract private investments.
- **Subsequent Frameworks:** Introduction of the Hotel Policy 2006, the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy 2007, and the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy 2015 (RTUP 2015). These initiatives helped increase tourist arrivals from 8.4 million in 2001 to 52 million in 2018 (Kumawat & Kumawat, 2021).
- **Post-Pandemic Boom:** According to the Department of Tourism, the State witnessed a massive domestic tourism resurgence post-COVID-19, clocking over 17.90 crore domestic tourists and 17 lakh foreign visitors in 2023 (Government of Rajasthan, 2024).

KEY PILLARS OF THE RAJASTHAN TOURISM POLICY 2020 & RURAL TOURISM SCHEME 2022

1. **Special Heritage / Craft Villages (SHV/SCV):** Identifying distinct village clusters to preserve dying craft forms and assigning long-term master plans managed by District Tourism Development Committees.
2. **Experiential & Adventure Tourism:** Establishing a dedicated Facilitation Cell to coordinate clearances for Aero tourism (hot air ballooning), Aqua tourism (boating/jet skiing in Banswara backwaters), and Land-based adventure tracks.
3. **Wildlife and Ecotourism:** Joint operations by the Departments of Tourism, Forest, and Environment to introduce eco-certification for hotels and launch pollution-free transport zones.
4. **Tribal Tourism Infrastructure:** Directing funds through tribal sub-plans to build adequate roads, interpretation centres, and marketing frameworks that highlight indigenous lifestyles.
5. **Rural Tourism Frameworks:** Creating a *Tourism Development Fund* to incentivise local homestays, caravan parks, and skill development programs to prevent migration and create local self-employment.

TOURISM IN RAJASTHAN POST-PANDEMIC TRANSFORMATION

An analysis of tourism trends in Rajasthan reveals a significant post-pandemic transformation. Driven by strategic policy interventions such as the *Rajasthan Tourism Policy 2020*, *Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme 2022*, and the recent *Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy 2024*, the State has evolved from a traditional seasonal gateway into an all-weather destination. The State has registered immense growth, with overall tourist arrivals expanding from 17.90 crore in 2023 to 23.22 crore in 2024, and reaching 25.44 crore in 2025.

To evaluate these figures conceptually, the total volume can be segmented across three core structural dimensions: **Urban (Heritage & MICE) Tourism**, **Rural Tourism**, and **Tribal Heritage Tourism**.

1. Five-Year Quantitative Growth & Macro Trends (2021–2025)

The trajectory of total tourist footfalls (combining both domestic and international visitors) underscores a strong domestic-led economic expansion:

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RAJASTHAN TOTAL TOURIST FOOTFALLS (2021–2025)

Year	Total Footfall (in Crores)	Primary Macro Drivers
2021	~2.20	Pandemic recovery baseline: restricted regional mobility and gradual reopening.
2022	~10.83	Surge in pent-up leisure demand; booster effect from granting formal "Industry Status" to the hospitality industry.
2023	18.07	Surging domestic destination weddings, luxury events, and family staycation tours.
2024	23.22	Massive 28.5% growth; high-impact mass cultural branding and rural circuit activation.
2025	25.44	Strategic 10% base consolidation; heavy expansion into the corporate MICE and offbeat experiential sectors.

(Note: Data aggregated from the Rajasthan Department of Tourism's Annual Progress Reports.
www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in)

2. Segmented Strategic Analysis

A. Urban Tourism (Heritage, MICE, and Weddings)

Urban centres like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, and Jaisalmer remain the primary economic engines of the State's tourism landscape.

- **MICE and Wedding Boom:** By 2024 and 2025, Rajasthan transformed its grand urban fortresses and palaces into prime destinations for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) and luxury destination weddings. This was further amplified by global events, such as the 25th IIFA Awards in Jaipur in March 2025.
- **Policy Inducement:** The official granting of full "**Industry Status**" to the tourism and hospitality sector enabled urban operators to access lower electricity tariffs and tax rebates, leading to a sharp increase in high-end inventory and urban boutique hotel investments.

B. Rural Tourism (Agritourism and Craft Villages)

Following severe urban saturation along the classic "Golden Triangle" routes, the State successfully decentralised traveller footprints through the Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme 2022.

- **Special Heritage & Craft Villages (SHV/SCV):** Local district administrations institutionalised clusters dedicated to live pottery, hand-block printing (e.g., Bagru and Sanganer), and stepwell restoration.
- **Socio-Economic Impact:** Over the five years, rural homestays provided structural economic insulation for agricultural families, capping rural-to-urban youth migration by offering alternative income avenues through localised cultural hospitality.

C. Tribal Heritage Tourism (The Vagad & Mewar Horizons)

Tribal tourism has evolved from passive observational excursions into active, community-led experiential itineraries centred in the southern Aravalli hills and the **Vagad Circuit** (Dungarpur, Banswara, and Pratapgarh).

- **The Appeal of Living Heritage:** Contemporary travellers increasingly prioritise authentic encounters with living History, bow-making craftsmanship, and indigenous practices of the Bhil and Meena tribes. Fairs like the **Baneshwar Tribal Fair** in Dungarpur have benefited from structured infrastructure to manage heavy seasonal crowds safely.
- **Diversification via Backwater Ecotourism:** In tandem with the *Viksit Bharat Abhiyan*, areas such as the Banswara backwaters ("City of a Hundred Islands") have successfully paired adventure aqua-tourism with tribal heritage loops, distributing economic benefits directly to indigenous sub-plan zones.

An analysis of tourism dynamics specifically comparing the **Udaipur (Mewar) Circuit** and the **Wagad (Vagad) Circuit** highlights a classic core-periphery relationship in regional development. While geographically contiguous and deeply linked through shared History, these two circuits exhibit highly contrasting structural realities across urban, rural, and tribal tourism vectors over the last five years. Tribal Areas in various districts of the State are richly endowed with tourist attractions, including temples, heritage sites, scenic beauty, and forests.

Tribal people also have their distinctive lifestyle and enchanting traditional practices. To showcase the tribal culture and attract visitors to these areas, adequate tourism infrastructure and facilities will be developed. Such places will be identified, and necessary tourism development work will be undertaken in tribal sub-plans and other schemes, for which a framework will be established. The Department of Tourism will prepare a marketing and promotion plan for tribal areas.

Comparing the Tourism Dynamics of Udaipur and the Vagad Circuits

<i>Structural Parameter</i>	<i>Udaipur (Mewar) Circuit</i>	<i>Wagad (Vagad) Circuit</i>
Geographic Scope	Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh, and Rajsamand districts.	Dungarpur, Banswara, and Pratapgarh (Deoliya) districts.
Volume Class	High-density, hyper-popular core tourist market.	Low-density, offbeat peripheral tourist market.
Dominant Brand Image	Royal heritage, luxury lake resorts, corporate MICE hubs, and premium destination weddings.	Living tribal cultures, forest ecology, pristine backwaters, and ancient temple ruins.
Tourism Type & Pacing	Highly commercialised, rapid-paced luxury and leisure holiday itineraries.	Slow-paced, highly authentic, spiritually and culturally immersive travel.
Infrastructure Status	Fully mature airport connectivity, expansive premium hospitality inventory, and high room keys.	Developing last-mile road connectivity, emerging local homestays, and boutique heritage hotels.

TOURISM POTENTIAL & BUILT HERITAGE OF THE VAGAD CIRCUIT

The southeastern part of Rajasthan is historically known as **Vagad (or Wagad)**, a region characterised by rolling green hills, dense forests, and river valleys (Nayma & Nehra, 2025). The Dungarpur, Banswara, and Pratapgarh districts, adjoining Udaipur's Chappan tracts, comprise the Vagad circuit. Archaeologically, the region hosts the ancient **Ahar-Banas culture**, contemporary and adjacent to

the Indus-Saraswati Valley civilisation, with more than 90 excavated sites indicating ancient copper smelting and resource trade (Misra, 1967).

KEY HERITAGE SITES IN THE VAGAD CIRCUIT

District / Location	Key Heritage Site	Typology & Architectural/Cultural Value
Dungarpur	Udai Bilas Palace	Royal Heritage: A 19th-century palace built on the banks of Gaibsagar Lake; it showcases classic Rajput architecture, with intricately carved balconies and majestic domes, and is currently operating as a premium heritage hotel.
	Juna Mahal (Old Palace)	Fortified Architecture: A 13th-century hilltop stronghold displaying extensive historical frescoes, elaborate mirror inlay work, and unique glass and stone carvings.
	Badal Mahal	Palace Architecture: A 14th-century panoramic structure perched overlooking the town and lake systems, standing as a historical monument to early regional rulers.
Galiakot	Galiakot Dargah (Bohra Sharif)	Spiritual Heritage: A major international pilgrimage centre for the Dawoodi Bohra community dedicated to Sufi saint Sayyed Fakhruddin Shaheed; showcases traditional Islamic architecture with white domes and elegant marble carvings.
	Hadi Shahar Complex	Civic & Hydraulic Heritage: Comprises the ancient Hadi Shahar Palace alongside the historic Hadi Shahar Baoli (stepwell), illustrating the region's medieval architectural and water-management systems.
	Kala Khoj Fort	Military Heritage: A rugged medieval fortress built on a high ridge overlooking the landscape, representing the defence network of early regional dynasties.
Arthuna	Arthuna Group of Temples	Archaeological Monument: An extraordinary cluster of 11th-century stone temples dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and Surya; built under the historical Paramara rulers and famed for detailed sculptures.
	Adinath Jain Temple	Religious Architecture: A highly complex medieval temple structure containing exquisite, intricate marble carvings and serene inner shrines dedicated to Jain Tirthankaras.
Banswara	Banswara City Palace	Royal Heritage: Built by Maharaja Udai Singh, this multi-layered urban palace features classic Rajput balconies, expansive ceremonial courtyards, and an extensive collection of royal artefacts.
	Maangarh Dham	Living Historical Sanctuary: A sacred hilltop monument honouring tribal resistance and sacrifice; features an ancient shrine and serves as a vital pilgrimage point for regional tribal groups.

INTANGIBLE BHIL CULTURAL HERITAGE

- **Folk Music and Dance:** The region is famous for the **Gair dance**, performed by men in concentric circles moving to the rhythm of *dhols* and *nagaras* during Holi. The **Ghoomar dance** remains an essential, graceful expression of tribal celebration.
- **Arts and Crafts:** Highly skilled artisans excel in silver filigree jewellery, traditional pottery, woodcrafts, and indigenous bandhani (tie-dye) textiles.
- **Fairs and Festivals:** The five-day **Baneshwar Tribal Fair**, held at the confluence of the Mahi, Som, and Jakham rivers in Dungarpur (January/February), attracts hundreds of thousands of indigenous pilgrims and travellers and showcases traditional customs, attire, weaponry, and song.
- **Cuisine:** Traditional dishes include *Khuba Roti*, *Dudh Paniye*, *Dal Baati Churma*, and local forest preparations like *Ker Sangri*.

- **Horticulture (Mallika Mangoes):** Banswara has emerged as a hub for cultivating the premium *Mallika* mango (a hybrid of Neelum and Dasherri), famous for its fiberless, sweet flesh.

Challenges Plaguing the Vagad Circuit

- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Inadequate road networks connecting remote shrines, insufficient quality sanitation facilities, and limited star-category accommodation options.
- **Marketing Gap:** The circuit remains overshadowed by the popular Jaipur-Jodhpur-Udaipur legacy route, limiting visibility.
- **Seasonality:** Heavy concentration of tourism arrivals during winter months and at local fairs (e.g., Baneshwar fair), resulting in massive economic fluctuations.
- **Eco-Degradation:** Risk of pollution and habitat disruption in sensitive forest areas from unmanaged mass tourism.
- **Community Disconnect:** Inefficient revenue-sharing models that fail to ensure profits from tribal tourism reach local communities directly.

Strategic Roadmap / Suggestions

- **Targeted Digital Marketing:** Leveraging GIS-backed mapping tools and launching targeted travel itineraries centred on the "Royal meets Tribal" theme (Yagnik & Yagnik, 2018).
- **Empowering Community Cooperatives:** Establishing local tribal cooperatives to directly operate homestays, ethnic food trails, and museum guide services, retaining revenue locally. Involve local communities in tourism planning, development, and decision-making to ensure their participation and equitable benefit-sharing. Empower communities through capacity-building initiatives, training programs, and entrepreneurship opportunities in the tourism sector.
- **Infrastructural Upgradation:** Enhancing last-mile connectivity to places like Arthuna and Maangarh Dham while maintaining ecological design aesthetics. Enhance transportation infrastructure, including roads, signage, and public transportation networks, to improve accessibility and connectivity within the Wagad Circuit. Develop tourist amenities, including accommodation, rest areas, and information centres, to meet visitors' needs.
- **Promoting All-Weather Ecotourism:** Developing water sports and lake-cruise facilities around Banswara's Mahi Dam backwaters to attract crowds during the monsoon season.
- **Rigid Heritage Conservation Guidelines:** Implementing strict Carrying Capacity (CC) limits and heritage conservation charters to protect delicate structures like Juna Mahal and the Arthuna shrines from rapid deterioration. Prioritise the preservation and conservation of heritage sites, monuments, and cultural assets within the Wagad Circuit. Develop heritage conservation plans, restoration projects, and interpretation initiatives to safeguard the region's cultural heritage for future generations.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop comprehensive marketing and promotional campaigns to raise awareness of the Wagad Circuit as a tourism destination. Utilise digital marketing channels, social media platforms, and tourism websites to reach a wider audience and showcase the region's unique attractions and experiences.

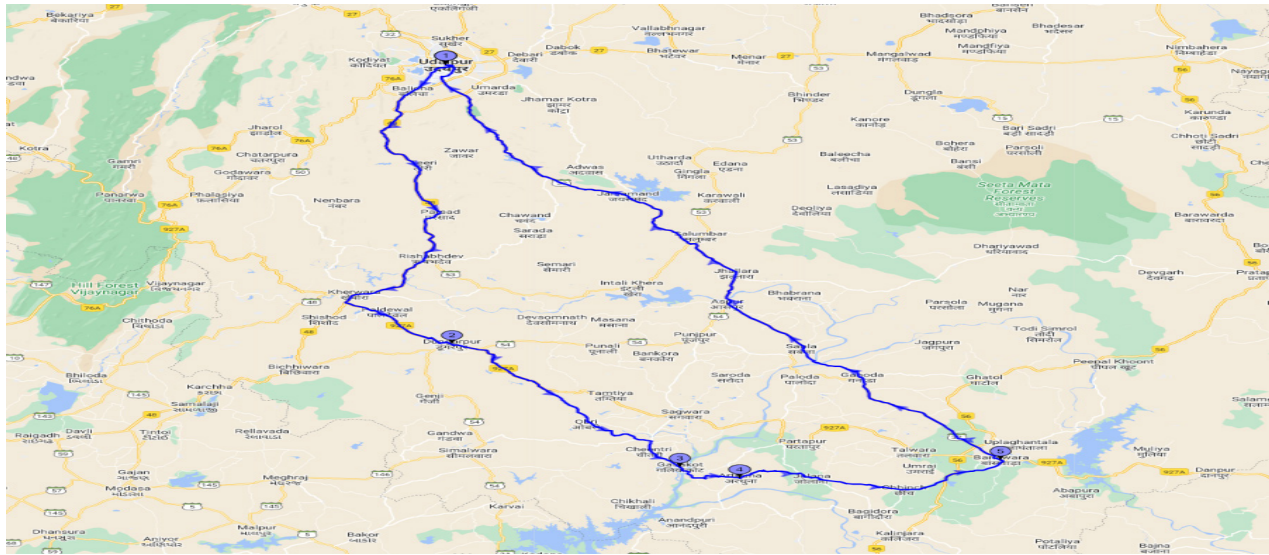
- **Diversification of Tourism Offerings:** Encourage the expansion of tourism offerings in the Wagad Circuit to attract a broader range of visitors. Promote adventure tourism activities such as trekking, wildlife safaris, and camping, as well as cultural experiences, heritage trails, and culinary tours.
- **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Implement sustainable tourism practices to minimise environmental impact and preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Wagad Circuit. Promote responsible tourism behaviour among visitors, including reducing waste, conserving water, and respecting local customs and traditions.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Foster collaboration and partnerships among government agencies, tourism stakeholders, local communities, and conservation organisations to address common challenges and effectively leverage resources. Establish multi-stakeholder platforms and task forces to coordinate tourism development efforts and share best practices.
- **Product Development and Quality Improvement:** Continuously innovate and improve tourism products and services in the Wagad Circuit to meet the evolving needs and preferences of visitors. Enhance visitor experiences through training programs, adherence to hospitality standards, and initiatives that promote customer service excellence.
- **Experiential Tourism:** With growing demand for new "experiences," several private stakeholders are offering exciting, innovative experiential tourism products that require government support, especially in marketing and promotion. The Department will compile a database of all such offerings and publish an e-brochure to disseminate information about them through its web portal and social media platforms. The Department will also issue guidelines for certifying such products. An incentive scheme will be introduced for startups in the tourism sector that create new experiential products in the Adventure Tourism technical thrust areas mentioned in the future.

CONCLUSION

By implementing these suggestions in a coordinated manner, stakeholders can work together to overcome the Wagad Circuit's challenges and unlock its potential as a sustainable and competitive tourism destination. The comprehensive analysis of the Wagad Circuit—encompassing the culturally and historically rich districts of Dungarpur, Banswara, and Pratapgarh—underscores a pivotal opportunity for regional tourism development within Rajasthan. Despite this immense potential, the Wagad Circuit currently operates on the periphery of the State's tourism economy, constrained by structural bottlenecks, including last-mile connectivity deficits, basic roadside and sanitation amenities, a lack of premium hospitality inventory, and low public marketing visibility.

Ultimately, the future sustainability of tourism in the Wagad Circuit hinges on an equitable governance model that positions local tribal populations as primary stakeholders and entrepreneurs. Delivering hospitality training, scaling up eco-certified homestays, and establishing direct craft marketing platforms will not only provide structural economic insulation for rural families but will also check youth migration. By anchoring these initiatives within the national vision of the Viksit Bharat Abhiyan, Rajasthan can safeguard its dynamic, fluid indigenous heritages while transforming the Wagad Circuit into a competitive, culturally rewarding, and self-sustaining oasis on the global travel map.

ROUTE MAP FOR VAGAD CIRCUIT.



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