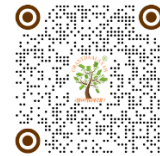


Original Article

HERITAGE AND TOURISM: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CITY OF LUCKNOW

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ABSTRACT

Lucknow, the historic capital of the erstwhile kingdom of Awadh, is dotted with one of the finest concentrations of Indo Islamic and colonial era architecture in North India, ranging from the grand Imambadas and gateways to gardens, palaces, and civic buildings. This study examines the relationship between heritage conservation and tourism development in Lucknow, arguing that the two are best understood not as separate activities but as mutually dependent processes. Heritage of any place gives a distinct identity to the city's tourism sector while tourism, when well managed, provides some of the economic relief and revenue needed to sustain conservation. This study also reviews some of Lucknow's principal heritage assets, the institutional and policy framework for their protection and conservation, and the persistent challenges of encroachment, poor upkeep, low visitor infrastructure, and uneven private investment that limits the sector's potential based on published tourism statistics, government records, and secondary literature about the monuments of Awadh. It concludes with recommendations for a more integrated heritage tourism strategy for the city.

Keywords: Heritage, Tourism, Lucknow, Awadh, Cultural, Monument, Conservation

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical literature on heritage tourism generally distinguishes it from mass tourism by its emphasis on awareness, education, and the visitor's engagement with historical narrative rather than purely recreational consumption. As far as the Indian context is concerned, studies on monument tourism have tended to concentrate on the country's UNESCO World Heritage properties like the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort, and the Fatehpur Sikri being the foremost among them. However, comparatively little sustained academic attention has been paid to second tier heritage cities such as Lucknow, whose monuments, though nationally significant, are not inscribed on the World Heritage List.

A separate section of writing, more historical and architectural than tourism focused, has documented Lucknow's Nawabi era monuments in considerable depth, tracing their patronage, construction, and stylistic development under successive rulers of Awadh. Government and industry reports on monument tourism in India, meanwhile, have periodically noted that visitor numbers at India's protected monuments remain heavily concentrated at a small number of iconic sites. However, a much larger number of nationally important but less internationally marketed monuments (a category into which most of Lucknow's heritage falls) receive a comparatively modest footfall relative to their historical significance. This paper draws these two literatures together, treating Lucknow's monuments simultaneously as historical artefacts and as an underexploited tourism resource.

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OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The paper has three objectives-first, to describe the principal categories of heritage asset available to Lucknow's tourism sector, second to examine the institutional and policy framework through which these assets are presently promoted and managed, and third, to identify the main challenges limiting the conversion of heritage value into sustainable tourism activity. The paper is based on a review of government tourism data and departmental records, published historical and architectural literature on Awadh and Lucknow, and secondary reports available on specific conservation and tourism initiatives in the city. It is conceptual and descriptive in method and also based on visits to these monuments.

'The CAG audit succinctly reveals that out of 487 Centrally Protected Monuments across three major ASI circles in Uttar Pradesh, a staggering 31 monuments remain untraceable. Glaring examples of the monuments lost on this count include the Qadam Rasul, Begum Kothi, Imambada Ghulam Husain Khan, Chota Chhatar Manzil of Lucknow, Narsimha Temple in Guntur, Shergarh Fort in Bihar, Rameswar Temple in Dharwar, Neel Kantha Mahadeva Temple in Banswara, Rajasthan, and dozens of similarly situated monuments. The number of monuments added post-independence is dismally'

Tourism is the set of activities engaged in by persons temporarily away from their usual environment, for a period of not more than one year, and for a broad range of leisure, business, religious, health, and personal reasons, excluding the pursuit of remuneration from within the place visited or long term change of residence.¹ Heritage tourism however is understood as travel undertaken specifically to experience the places, artefacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past, and it occupies a distinctive place within the wider tourism industry because the heritage that exists in the form of historic buildings, precincts, and living traditions cannot be manufactured or relocated. According to UNESCO, *'Heritage refers to the cultural, historical, and social legacies passed down through generations.'*²

For a city such as Lucknow, this distinction of being a heritage city is especially significant. Few Indian cities outside Delhi and Agra can claim a comparable density of protected and unprotected historic structures within a single urban area, spanning the Nawabi period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the upheaval of 1857, and more than a century of colonial and post-colonial buildings. The Bara Imambada, Chhota Imambada, Rumi Darwaza, the Residency, the Chhatar Manzil, and many smaller Imambadas, havelis, kothis and gardens together constitute a heritage resource of national importance. All of these are categorised under the head: **tangible heritage**. The term tangible heritage refers in general to all the material traces such as archaeological sites, historical monuments, artifacts, and objects that are significant to a community, a nation, or humanity. The term is often used to distinguish such heritage elements from **intangible heritage**, recognized by UNESCO in 2003, to refer to practices, representations, expressions, knowledge skills, as well as instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith of living communities.³ Heritage tourism is therefore defined as traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, which include historic, cultural and natural attractions.⁴ And Lucknow offers a plethora of heritage attractions both tangible and intangible which needs to be brought to the forefront like any other monument of national importance.

This study analysis the role that heritage plays in Lucknow's present day tourism economy, what institutional and policy structures exist to translate heritage assets into tourism value, and what obstacles continue to limit this translation. In doing so, it treats heritage and tourism not as competing claims on the same buildings but as two sides of a single conservation and development problem. Lucknow's tourism sector, has historically not been treated at par with that of nearby pilgrimage and monument circuits such as Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Agra, and therefore needs to be studied and analysed.

Architecture constituted a major part of the resources and patronage of the nawabs, who adorned the capital with magnificent buildings standing tall through the trials of times. In a period of 100 years the city of Lucknow was studded with scores of palaces, monumental gateways, mosques, Imambadas, karbalas and other related monuments big and small. Nawabi Lucknow's heritage resources can usefully be grouped into four categories. The first group consists of grand Nawabi era monuments of a religious and ceremonial nature, most prominently the Bara Imambada complex built by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula in the 1780s, together with its Bhulbhulaiya, (the famous labyrinth) and the Asafi Masjid, iconic the Rumi Darwaza, an imposing gateway erected in 1784 in a style said to replicate the Sublime Porte (Bab e Humayun) of Constantinople. The gate often recognised as the signature monument of Lucknow.

The second category of monuments consists of smaller but historically significant religious structures, including the Chhota Imambada and the Sibtainabad Imambada, and many others which remain in active religious use and are held partly or wholly in waqf.

The third category consists of non religious monuments associated with the events of 1857, chief among them being the Residency complex, whose deliberately unrestored ruins are maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India as a landscaped historic site rather than rebuilt, preserving the physical record of the siege for visitors and researchers alike. The Residency is a live monument telling the stories of the events of 1857. The fourth category consists of colonial and early twentieth century civic and institutional architecture including the Constantia (La Martiniere College), Chhatar Manzil, the Kaiserbagh palace complex, and many

government buildings along the modern Hazratganj market place which, though generally less prioritised in tourism promotion than the Nawabi monuments, together give central Lucknow much of its distinctive streetscape.

Beyond built heritage which is tangible in nature, Lucknow's intangible cultural assets include its cuisine (which is now recognised by UNESCO), its Kathak dance tradition, its Chikankari embroidery, and the courtly etiquette summed up in the local terms as *tehzeeb* and *adab* which form an increasingly important part of how the city is marketed to visitors, reflecting a broader shift in heritage tourism promotion away from monuments alone and toward an integrated experience of place.

Responsibility for tourism promotion in Lucknow is shared between the Department of Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh and the Archaeological Survey of India, which manages centrally protected monuments including the Residency and several Imambadas. The State Department of Archaeology is responsible for state protected structures, while the municipal bodies are responsible for civic infrastructure around heritage precincts. At the state level, tourism has grown into a significant part of the Uttar Pradesh economy. According to data (2025) released by the Union ministry of tourism, the state recorded more than 137 crore domestic tourist visits during the year, ranking first in the country, while 3.66 lakh foreign tourists travelled to various destinations across Uttar Pradesh, placing it fourth nationally in foreign arrivals.⁵ The biggest contributor to this record tourism was the Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, which witnessed a historic turnout of over 66 crore devotees, making it one of the largest religious congregations ever. Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura Vrindavan, and Shravasti were among the other major destinations which continued to draw heavy footfall throughout the year. Flagship attractions have been the Deepotsav in Ayodhya, Dev Deepawali in Varanasi and Rangotsav in Braj which drew tourists from across the country and abroad. As per the data available on the official website of the Taj Mahal, the iconic monument attracts from 7 to 8 million visitors annually, with more than 0.8 million from overseas.

This pattern reflects a broader feature of Indian heritage tourism. Visitor numbers are heavily skewed toward the globally marketed, UNESCO listed sites, while a much larger population of nationally significant but less internationally promoted monuments (the category into which nearly all of Lucknow's heritage falls) receives comparatively modest attention relative to its historical importance. This therefore implies that for Lucknow, heritage tourism growth depends less on the scale of the city's monuments, which is considerable, than on sustained investment in visitor infrastructure, digital and international marketing, and improved physical access to and interpretation of individual sites.

State tourism policy in recent years has attempted to address this gap through heritage walks, illuminated night viewing of major monuments, restoration linked tourism circuits connecting Lucknow with other towns such as Faizabad and Kannauj, and promotion of the city's culinary and craft traditions alongside its monuments. UNESCO has announced the designation of 58 Creative Cities, which join the Organization's dedicated Network. Lucknow has been named a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. The announcement celebrates Lucknow's rich culinary heritage and centuries old food traditions that continue to thrive through innovation, community participation, and sustainable practices.⁶ This is in turn add to the tourism value of the city which can be further used by the department of tourism for the promotion of Lucknow as a heritage spot. As far as the tangible heritage is concerned, the effectiveness of these initiatives, depends heavily on the underlying condition of the monuments themselves, which brings to the forefront the conservation challenges examined in the next section.

Several structural challenges limit the extent to which Lucknow's heritage assets are converted into sustained tourism value. A change is needed, with a new urban heritage management system to respond to each city's unique administrative, cultural and cognitive dynamics to better integrate local preservation, planning, legislative and administrative efforts.⁷ The first challenge is ***the physical condition of these monuments***, a number of the city's smaller, lesser talked about and lesser marketed monuments, many of them protected in principle but are under resourced in practice. These monuments suffer from encroachment, poor drainage, and unsympathetic alteration by residents and local businessmen. These are the conditions that discourage repeat visitation and unfavourable comparison with better maintained sites elsewhere in India. The case study of Imambada Sibtainabad offers a documented example. The Imambada built by Nawab Amjad Ali Shah for Muharram mournings was a monument with beautiful stucco work and ornamentation which unfortunately fell victim to encroachments, apathy and neglect after 1857. The Monument even today is surrounded by haphazard and improper constructions from all sides, adversely affecting its archaeological status and grandeur'. *The Imambada which is loved and revered had been surely on its way of becoming a lost monument*'. Only two of the gateways, one on the front, opposite the Halwasiya market and the other at the entrance of the Imambada are extant today. Archaeological Survey of India (A.S.I.) has, done a yeoman's job in restoring part of the main Imambada structure in its control, in the form of a hall with decorated archways, still, lots needs to be done by the concerned stakeholders which include the Archaeological Survey of India, the Wakf Board, the District Administration, the Municipal Corporation and the Lucknow Development Authority, who need to ensure that this majestic monument is not only restored, but also maintained regularly. Although its main structure was restored by the Archaeological Survey of India between 2008 and 2017 following sustained advocacy by its caretaker, its historic outer gateway subsequently collapsed in 2021 (now restored), and the compound continues to show alterations that sit awkwardly against its restored core a reminder that partial restoration does not automatically translate into a tourism ready site.

A second challenge is ***fragmented custodianship***. This implies that the responsibility, oversight, or caretaking of the heritage structures is split across multiple disconnected organizations, departments, or authorities. There is a lack of centralized or unified

control which often leads to coordination challenges, inefficiencies, and gaps in accountability. Heritage protection in Lucknow is divided between the Archaeological Survey of India, the State Department of Archaeology, waqf boards, municipal authorities and visitor infrastructure therefore signage, ticketing, sanitation, parking, and interpretation is rarely standardised across sites. Therefore, many monuments of the city stand as poorly signposted and difficult to access and therefore make tourism a challenge in the area. One contrast here exists in the form of the Constantia which is preserved and protected by the La Martiniere College itself, a classic case of private ownership.

A third challenge is the **absence of area based heritage regulation**. Because national and state monument law protects individual notified structures rather than the historic precincts around them, commercial development in areas such as Hazratganj and Chowk has in places proceeded with little regard for the visual setting of nearby monuments, gradually eroding the historicity that gives heritage tourism in Lucknow much of its appeal. The core monument structures are either encroached or have unwanted structures built around the monument making accessibility and upkeep of the monument extremely difficult. An example of the same being the Chhota Imambada gates which besides housing a police chowki are also a victim to the growth of a food arcade leading to undue vehicular traffic and accumulated litter around the heritage structure. Many such monuments of yore have disappeared into the pages of history, the most significant being the grand Begum Kothi which once stood in the modern day Janpath market. The palace was heavily damaged in 1857 and completely demolished in 1977. The Chhota Chattar Manzil also finds no existence today though mentioned in all works related to the history of Awadh. A fourth and related challenge is **limited private investment**-heritage hotels, guided tour operators, and craft based tourism enterprises remain comparatively underdeveloped in Lucknow relative to more established heritage tourism destinations such as Jaipur or Udaipur, partly for want of a coordinated public private promotional strategy.

The evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that the problem with Lucknow's tourism industry is not a shortage of heritage assets but a shortage of coordinated conservation mechanisms. An integrated strategy would need to bring together at least four elements- sustained, adequately funded conservation of both flagship and lesser known monuments, a single window visitor information and ticketing system spanning ASI, State, and municipal sites and area based heritage regulation to protect the historic setting of the monuments. This also requires an active encouragement of private investment in heritage linked hospitality, craft retail, and guided interpretation. Each of these elements reinforces the others, as better conserved monuments attract more visitors, more visitors justify more infrastructure investment, and a protected historic setting makes that investment more likely to be heritage sensitive rather than heritage displacing.

Community and civil society involvement as seen in caretaker led advocacy for individual monuments can play a valuable but currently under institutionalised role in this process, and that future policy could usefully create formal channels through which such local engagement feeds into both conservation and tourism planning, rather than leaving it to individual initiative as seen in most cases. The most appropriate example of this is the case of Imambada Sibtainabad which has been restored as result of local engagement, personal advocacy and follow up by heritage enthusiasts of the city. After presenting a ruinous look for several decades, surrounded by shanties, shops and garbage, public spirited citizens of Lucknow came together taking a commendable initiative for restoring the look and purpose of the Imambada under the leadership of Mohammad Haider, the Mutawwali of the Waqf Sibtainabad Committee.⁸ This however need to be encouraged and replicated for other monuments of the city. For anyone who visits Lucknow or is a heritage enthusiast must not miss the chance of going to this lovely architectural edifice which is a perfect example of heritage conservation. Similarly, regarding the Rumi Darwaza and the gates of the Chhota Imambada the involvement of individuals, the A.S.I, State Archaeology Department and the INTACH the gates are on the way to restoration. The Government of Uttar Pradesh has proposed to develop a Heritage Hotel in the premises of the historic **Chattar Manzil**. The government has also planned the construction of a special gallery inside the complex showcasing Lucknow's rich history filled with amazing artifacts. Visitors to the museum will get a feel and glimpse of Lucknow's glorious past.⁹ Despite all the Government initiative, a lot of public awareness and involvement at all levels is imperative for the sustenance of heritage tourism in the city of Lucknow to give an unprecedented boost to heritage tourism.

Lucknow possesses a heritage resource base that is, in density and historical significance, comparable to that of India's better known heritage cities, yet its tourism sector has not fully realised the value of this resource. The city's experience shows that heritage protection and tourism development are not separate concerns but interdependent processes, a monument's physical condition determines its tourism potential, and tourism revenue and public attention, in turn, can generate the resources and political will needed for conservation. Realising this potential will require closer coordination among the several authorities responsible for Lucknow's monuments, dedicated area based heritage regulation, and a more deliberate strategy for translating the city's exceptional architectural and cultural inheritance into a sustained tourism economy.

As discussed, Lucknow has immense potential to emerge as an internationally recognized heritage hub by combining the conservation of its Nawabi architecture with world class tourism infrastructure and authentic cultural experiences. Scientific restoration of monuments both popular and not so popular with adaptive reuse of old buildings into heritage hotels and museums, can preserve the city's old character while meeting global standards. Enhancing visitor experience through multilingual guides, AR based storytelling, night tourism, light and sound shows, clean pedestrian zones, and safe public facilities will make Lucknow more accessible and welcoming for Indian and international travellers. At the same time, promoting Lucknow's living heritage its Awadhi

cuisine, chikankari and zardozi crafts, kathak, ghazal, tehzeeb, and festivals like Lucknow Mahotsav at an International level can create a unique brand identity. With better international connectivity, sustainable transport in heritage areas, interpretation centres, and targeted global marketing that positions Lucknow as **'The City of Nawabs - Where Courtesy Lives,'** the city can offer tourists not just monuments to see, but an immersive cultural experience that matches international heritage destinations.

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