

Balancing Heritage Preservation and Tourism Growth: A Study of Public Perceptions in Pune City

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Abstract

Tourism development in urban destinations increasingly depends on how effectively cities balance cultural preservation, infrastructure readiness, environmental responsibility, and destination promotion. Pune city possesses a distinctive tourism profile shaped by its historical monuments, religious landmarks, educational identity, and cultural landscape. However, the presence of tourism resources alone does not ensure destination competitiveness. The present study examines resident perceptions of sustainable heritage tourism development in Pune city through primary data collected using a structured questionnaire. The study analyses public opinion on the current state of tourism, major attractions, tourism infrastructure, preservation of cultural heritage, sustainable development measures, and the effectiveness of existing promotional efforts. The findings indicate that respondents widely recognize Pune's rich tourism potential, particularly in relation to attractions such as Shaniwar Wada, Sinhagad Fort, Aga Khan Palace, Dagadusheth Halwai Ganapati Temple, and other heritage sites. At the same time, concerns regarding traffic congestion, inadequate public transport, poor roads, limited tourist-oriented civic amenities, insufficient cleanliness, and weak destination promotion emerged strongly. A notable outcome of the study is that respondents view cultural heritage preservation as central to tourism planning rather than secondary to it. The paper concludes that Pune's tourism future depends on a resident-informed, heritage-led, and sustainability-oriented development approach that integrates conservation, civic management, infrastructure improvement, and more strategic destination branding.

Keywords: Pune city, sustainable tourism, heritage tourism, resident perception, urban tourism, destination development

1. Introduction

Tourism is no longer assessed only in terms of arrival numbers or destination popularity. In contemporary tourism discourse, the quality of tourism development is equally important, especially in urban centres where cultural assets, infrastructure, local communities, and environmental systems interact closely. Sustainable tourism planning requires that cities preserve their distinctive identity while improving the quality of visitor experience. In this context, resident perception has become an important area of inquiry

because local communities are both the everyday custodians of place and the stakeholders most directly affected by tourism expansion.

Pune city offers a meaningful context for such a study. It is known not only as an educational and cultural centre, but also as a city with substantial historical, religious, and architectural significance. Attractions such as Shaniwar Wada, Aga Khan Palace, Sinhagad Fort, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Dagadusheth Halwai Ganapati Temple, Parvati Hill, Vishrambaug Wada, Saras Baug, Pataleshwar Cave Temple, and Osho International Meditation Resort contribute to a diverse tourism identity. At the same time, urban pressures such as traffic congestion, infrastructural strain, unplanned growth, and uneven destination promotion create challenges for tourism development.

The issue is therefore not whether Pune has tourism assets, but whether the city is perceived to be ready for sustainable tourism growth. Urban tourism succeeds when visitors can access attractions comfortably, interpret heritage meaningfully, move safely through the city, and experience cleanliness, hospitality, and cultural authenticity. When such conditions are weak, even a destination with strong attractions may struggle to build a competitive tourism image.

This study shifts the analytical focus from tourism potential alone to public perception of sustainable heritage tourism development. It is based on primary responses collected from residents and other informed participants who expressed views on Pune's attractions, infrastructure, preservation priorities, sustainability measures, and tourism promotion strategies. The paper argues that the future of tourism in Pune depends not only on showcasing attractions, but on strengthening the relationship between conservation, civic planning, and visitor-oriented urban management.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine perceptions regarding the current state of tourism in Pune city.
2. To identify the major tourism attractions and development priorities perceived by respondents.
3. To assess the importance given to cultural heritage preservation in the process of tourism development.
4. To analyse public views on infrastructure, sustainability measures, and tourism promotion in Pune city.
5. To suggest a resident-informed framework for sustainable heritage tourism development in Pune.

3. Review of Literature

Tourism development literature has increasingly emphasized the role of local communities in shaping destination sustainability. Resident perception studies show that community support for tourism is influenced by whether development is seen as culturally respectful, economically beneficial, and socially manageable. In heritage cities especially, tourism planning must be sensitive to place identity and the symbolic significance of monuments, rituals, and built environments.

Research on sustainable urban tourism suggests that destination development cannot rely solely on attraction inventories. Infrastructure quality, mobility systems, sanitation, visitor services, public safety, information access, and environmental management are crucial determinants of tourism competitiveness. When these dimensions are weak, the destination image suffers, even if the city possesses unique heritage resources.

Heritage tourism scholarship has further established that built heritage and intangible cultural value are major components of urban tourism differentiation. Historical structures, temples, museums, public

memorials, and cultural landscapes provide narrative depth to cities and help them stand out from generic urban destinations. However, commercialization without conservation can weaken authenticity and reduce the long-term value of heritage assets.

A related body of work highlights the growing importance of destination branding and digital promotion. In a competitive tourism environment, cities must communicate their identity clearly through websites, storytelling, social media, signage, and tourism circuits. Promotion is most effective when it reflects local distinctiveness rather than generic marketing language.

Studies on sustainable tourism also underline the importance of balancing environmental protection with visitor growth. Waste management, traffic regulation, public transport, conservation of green areas, and protection of heritage precincts are essential if tourism is to remain viable without creating urban stress. Thus, sustainability in tourism must be understood not merely as an ecological slogan, but as an integrated planning principle.

The present study contributes to this broader literature by examining how respondents perceive the relationship between heritage preservation, infrastructure, sustainability, and tourism promotion in Pune city. It places local perception at the centre of tourism planning and interprets tourism development as a multidimensional urban governance issue.

4. Research Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and is based on primary data. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondent perceptions regarding tourism development in Pune city. The questionnaire included items related to demographic profile, overall rating of tourism in Pune, major tourist attractions, additional attractions or amenities required, importance of cultural heritage preservation, sustainable tourism measures, infrastructure and service quality, and the effectiveness of tourism promotion.

The dataset includes responses from participants across different age groups, occupations, and genders. Since the objective of the study was to understand perception rather than measure physical infrastructure directly, the analysis combined descriptive interpretation with thematic categorization of open-ended responses.

Closed-ended responses were interpreted through recurring patterns in rating categories such as excellent, good, fair, poor, and very poor. Open-ended responses were coded into major themes. These themes included:

- heritage preservation and restoration
- public transport and connectivity
- traffic congestion
- cleanliness and waste management
- environmental sustainability
- safety and tourist guidance
- digital promotion and destination branding
- diversification into educational, eco-, cultural, and food tourism

The study is limited to perception-based responses and does not claim to represent all resident groups in Pune statistically. However, the findings remain valuable because they reveal the concerns, expectations, and priorities that shape public support for tourism development.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Perception of the Current State of Tourism in Pune

The responses indicate that Pune is generally perceived as a city with notable tourism potential, but not one that has yet fully realized that potential. A large share of respondents rated the present tourism condition as fair or good, while a smaller but important group described it as poor or very poor. This pattern suggests a mixed but meaningful assessment: Pune is seen as promising, yet operationally underdeveloped as a tourism destination.

The implication is that respondents do not deny the city's tourism value. Rather, they perceive a gap between existing attractions and the supporting systems needed to convert those attractions into a stronger tourism experience.

5.2 Major Attractions Identified by Respondents

The dataset shows a consistent recognition of heritage, religious, and cultural sites as the backbone of Pune's tourism identity. Among the most repeatedly mentioned attractions were Shaniwar Wada, Sinhagad Fort, Aga Khan Palace, Dagadusheth Halwai Ganapati Temple, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Parvati Hill and Temples, Vishrambaug Wada, Saras Baug, Pataleshwar Cave Temple, National War Memorial Southern Command, and Osho International Meditation Resort.

This indicates that the tourism image of Pune is not based on a single landmark but on a portfolio of heritage and culture-oriented attractions. The city's tourism strengths therefore lie in its layered urban history, religious significance, and architectural memory.

5.3 Importance of Cultural Heritage Preservation

A major finding of the dataset is the strong support for preserving Pune's cultural heritage while developing tourism. Most respondents described heritage preservation as either extremely important or very important. Only a negligible proportion appeared to treat it as less important.

This result is significant because it shows that respondents do not see tourism growth and heritage protection as conflicting goals. On the contrary, preservation is understood as a precondition for meaningful tourism development. This suggests that any tourism strategy for Pune must be heritage-led rather than heritage-neutral.

5.4 Infrastructure and Service Readiness

The responses reveal that infrastructure remains one of the biggest constraints on Pune's tourism development. Repeated concerns were raised regarding:

- poor roads
- traffic congestion
- inadequate public transport
- lack of tourist-friendly connectivity
- insufficient cleanliness
- need for toilets, drinking water, signage, maps, and guidance services
- weak internal connectivity between tourist spots

Several respondents specifically called for tourist bus services, better metro and bus access, traffic control, identifiable transport routes, and safer movement within the city. These responses show that tourism readiness depends not only on attractions themselves, but on the wider urban service system surrounding them.

5.5 Sustainability Concerns

Open-ended responses strongly reflect a sustainability-oriented outlook. Common recommendations inc-

luded reducing litter, improving waste management, protecting hills and open spaces, promoting eco-friendly practices, reducing plastic use, maintaining riverbeds, ensuring water management, and supporting greener transport solutions.

Many respondents also connected sustainability with local behaviour, civic discipline, and community participation. This indicates that sustainable tourism in Pune is perceived not merely as environmental preservation but as responsible urban conduct. Respondents thus frame sustainability as a shared responsibility among local authorities, businesses, residents, and visitors.

5.6 Promotion and Destination Branding

Another important theme in the data is dissatisfaction with the city's current promotional efforts. Many respondents rated Pune's tourism promotion as only somewhat effective or not very effective. Suggested improvements included:

- stronger social media campaigns
- tourism websites and digital content
- destination branding
- heritage storytelling
- public hoardings and visual displays
- participation in exhibitions
- city tours and tourism circuits
- festival-based promotion
- travel schemes and promotional packages

These findings suggest that Pune has a visibility problem as much as an infrastructure problem. Respondents repeatedly implied that the city is known more as an education hub than as a tourism destination. Effective branding therefore requires redefining Pune's image in a way that foregrounds its heritage, culture, local food, festivals, and unique urban experiences.

5.7 Emerging Alternative Tourism Possibilities

An interesting feature of the responses is that participants did not restrict Pune's tourism potential to conventional sightseeing. Several suggestions pointed toward:

- educational tourism
- eco-tourism
- food tourism
- trekking circuits
- museum development
- art galleries
- cultural activities
- nature trails
- parks and walkways
- farm tourism
- home stays and heritage hotels

This indicates that Pune's future tourism strategy may benefit from diversification. Rather than relying solely on monument-based tourism, the city can build thematic circuits and experience-based tourism products that reflect its wider regional identity.

6. Major Findings

The major findings of the study are as follows:

Pune city is perceived as possessing strong tourism potential, especially because of its historical, religious, and cultural attractions.

Heritage landmarks such as Shaniwar Wada, Sinhagad Fort, Aga Khan Palace, and Dagadusheth Halwai Ganapati Temple dominate public perception of the city's tourism appeal.

Cultural heritage preservation is considered highly important by a large majority of respondents, indicating that conservation is central to public support for tourism development.

Infrastructure-related weaknesses, particularly traffic congestion, poor roads, limited public transport, insufficient cleanliness, and inadequate tourist amenities, are perceived as major barriers.

Sustainability is understood in practical terms: waste management, environmental protection, greenery, civic behaviour, and community participation.

Current tourism promotion is widely viewed as moderate or inadequate, with respondents strongly favouring digital outreach, storytelling, and city branding.

Respondents also perceive untapped potential in educational tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and food-based tourism experiences.

7. Suggestions

Based on the analysis, the following suggestions are proposed:

Pune should adopt a heritage-led tourism development approach in which restoration, interpretation, and maintenance of cultural sites are treated as core priorities.

Tourism infrastructure should be improved through better roads, public transport connectivity, tourist bus circuits, multilingual signage, information centres, public toilets, and safe drinking water facilities.

Traffic management must be integrated into tourism planning, especially around high-footfall heritage and religious sites.

Cleanliness and environmental management should be strengthened through visible waste segregation, anti-litter enforcement, plastic reduction, and regular maintenance of tourism zones.

Destination branding should be redesigned to communicate Pune's unique identity as a city of heritage, education, culture, spirituality, food, and nearby nature-based experiences.

Digital marketing should be expanded through curated websites, social media storytelling, short-form videos, heritage narratives, and festival-based campaigns.

Local communities should be included more directly through awareness initiatives, guide training, community-based tourism, and support for local businesses.

Tourism diversification should be encouraged by developing educational circuits, food trails, eco-tourism options, nature experiences, museum-based programming, and heritage walks.

8. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Pune is widely recognized as a city with substantial tourism potential, but one whose tourism future depends on better planning rather than mere attraction visibility. Respondents clearly value the city's heritage and cultural landscape, yet they also identify serious operational concerns related to infrastructure, mobility, cleanliness, and promotion.

One of the most important contributions of the study is the finding that heritage preservation is not viewed as an obstacle to tourism development. Instead, it is seen as the very foundation of Pune's tourism appeal.

This insight has practical relevance for city planners and tourism authorities. If tourism development proceeds without attention to conservation, sustainability, and civic readiness, the city risks weakening the very identity that draws visitors.

The paper therefore concludes that Pune's tourism strategy should be resident-informed, sustainability-oriented, and heritage-centred. Such an approach would not only improve visitor experience, but also strengthen the city's long-term destination identity and social legitimacy. A city like Pune does not need to manufacture tourism value from scratch; it needs to manage and communicate its existing value more thoughtfully and responsibly.

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