



EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF STEPWELLS AS HERITAGE TOURISM ATTRACTIONS IN GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

Famous for its history and culture, Gujarat is one of the regions having a rich diversity of architectural monuments, archaeological sites, places of worship, traditional habitats and indigenous water management systems in India. Stepwells which are locally known as vav or vivid are an important if comparatively lesser studied part of the state's material and non-material culture. Initially built to access groundwater after the seasonal rains due to water scarcity, stepwells developed into more complex multi-purpose spaces, integrating architectural, artistic, religious, social and community functions. The structures of Rani-ki-Vav at Patan, Adalaj Stepwell near Ahmadabad, Dada Harir in Vav, etc. are a testimony to the technological knowledge, craftsmanship, aesthetic sensibility and environmental adaptation of Gujarat's past. This paper discusses the feasibility of selective Stepwells of Gujarat for heritage tourism. A thorough analysis is done in respect of palaces their significance in history, architecture, culture, environment and tourism. It also looks into access, interpretation, conservation, visitors' management, community participation and sustainable tourism development issues. The research employs a mixed-method approach combining documentary and secondary sources, diverse field observations, tourists' survey and interviews of the local community, tourism, heritage professionals and institutional representatives. The study specifically aims to compare internationally acclaimed stepwells with less well-known ones and identify merits for their linking to an extended heritage tourism circuit. The study makes a case for Gujarat's step wells to make excellent heritage tourism resources. The reason behind this is that these step wells have architectural finesse, knowledge of water management, religious connotation, artistic expression, social history and adaptation to nature. Nevertheless, their potential is hampered due to misinterpretation, lack of public awareness, varying levels of tourism promotion and conservation efforts, insufficient visitor infrastructure and weak integration of lesser-known sites into tourism circuits. As such, the study suggests a sustainable stepwell heritage tourism framework based on conservation, professional interpretation, community participation, digital technologies, responsible visitor management and livelihoods. Through this, cultural tourism can be enhanced in Gujarat but tourism development should not undermine the authenticity and sustainability of stepwell heritage. Heritage tourism in Gujarat must focus on the vav or stepwells and sustainable tourism must be ensured.

Keywords: Stepwells, Heritage Tourism, Gujarat, Vav Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Conservation, Sustainable Tourism.

Introduction

Heritage defines the community's inherited cultural, historical, architectural, social and environmental legacy. In modern tourism, heritage resources increasingly serve as more than just



emblems of the past. They also act as attractions that can assist with cultural learning, destination development, community action and local economic activity. As a result, heritage tourism has emerged as a field of interdisciplinary research in history, archaeology, architecture, conservation, tourism management, anthropology and sustainable development.

Gujarat is of particular importance for exploring heritage tourism interaction for a number of reasons. The state is rich in various cultures due to its archaeological relics, historic cities, temples, mosques, forts, palaces, traditional villages, crafts, pilgrimage centres and native waterworks. Stepwells are among the most unique expressions of the architectural and environmental heritage of the region. Stepwells or vav in Gujarat were developed essentially to access groundwater under situations of seasonal rain and periodic water scarcity. However, their functional tasks were accompanied by increasingly complex architectural and artistic development. Several stepwells had staircases, underground rooms, corridors, columns, platforms, sculptures, engravings and decorative motifs. They became spaces through which technological knowledge, religion, art, charity, social life and daily existence intersected each other.

Gujarat's stepwell tradition is particularly significant at Rani-ki-Vav at Patan, which entered the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014. Its entry on the list signifies stepwells can possess outstanding universal value beyond their originally intended function. Other places like Adalaj Stepwell and Dada Harir in Vav also show the architectural and cultural richness of the water heritage of Gujarat. The tourism potential of stepwells is not equally realised; despite the considerable heritage value they possess. While recognised monuments attract a lot of attention. The lesser-known stepwells escape the tourism radar. If we consider several situations involving their development as heritage attractions, limitations on accessibility, interpretation, signage, visitor facilities, conservation, awareness, promotion, community involvement block the attractions or uses of heritage sites.

The current study, therefore, considers stepwells to be multifunctional heritage resources rather than just historical water structures. It looks into the link between the significance of heritage, attractiveness as a tourist destination, visitors' experience, conservation, community involvement, digital interpretation and sustainable development of the destination.

Stepwells in Gujarat Have an Interesting History

In Gujarat's history, water has been an integral part of the social, economic and cultural growth. Due to climatic fluctuations, seasonal rainfall and local environmental conditions, there arose a need for systems which could collect, store and access water in different water seasons. Stepwells were a unique answer to these conditions. Stepwells were not like ordinary wells which required ropes to lowered in the water. The further design allowed users to step down.

Due to complex architectural development, they became multi-storeyed cave:

Besides supplying water, they could have been resting places, meeting places, spaces associated with worship or religion and places associated with charity. The patronage and charity were also linked to stepwell construction. Rulers, nobles, traders, big businessmen and other sections of society construction of water structures was through a public benefit or some religious merit. As such, stepwells often featured inscriptions, sculpture, religious imagery and architectural decoration. The cultural significance of these structures is their ability to reflect the interaction of human communities with the environment. They contain traditional knowledge about water, stone, construction, climate adaptation and community organisation.

**Through a modern lens, stepwells can add to...**

1. Cultural tourism
2. architectural travel
3. learning about cultures
4. responsible tourism
5. tourism-based community
6. Jobs in the Community.
7. Branding a destination.
8. preserving cultural legacy
9. Education on the Environment
10. Familiarity with age-old water-management methods

Gujarat's Stepwells and Their Heritage Tourism Potential

Traveling by human beings to a place for cultural and natural heritage, is called heritage tourism. Step-wells have several features that make them ideal candidates for heritage tourism. To begin with, their architectural design creates a distinct visitor experience. The transition from above ground to below ground creates a different experience of space as compared to normal monuments. Moreover, their sculptures, decorative elements and other objects present various unique opportunities. In regards to their relationship with water, there is an opportunity to share essences of environmental knowledge. Fourth, stepwells can be included in broader thematic tourism circuits. For example, Rani-ki-Vav could get connectivity with other heritage attractions in Patan and around, while Adalaj could get included in Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar heritage circuits. Regional heritage trails can be integrated with lesser-known stepwells. Hence, the number of visitors cannot be the only measure of tourism value of stepwells. The criteria for evaluating the merit of a heritage project must include educational value, visitor satisfaction, authenticity and conservation outcomes.

Literature Review

The architectural traditions of western India have been shown to be stepwells by historical and architectural scholarship. Cousens' documentation of architectural antiquities in northern Gujarat is an important source for the history of monuments and architectural development in the region. Given their architectural complexity, Gujarat's stepwells cannot be interpreted solely as hydraulic structures. The underground spaces, columns, halls, dasas, akuas, inscriptions and decorative motifs are the result of engineering and artistic traditions.

Rani-ki-Vav is the best example of this fusion. The status granted by UNESCO validates the unique importance of stepwell architecture as an expression of technical, artistic and cultural development.

Stepwells and Local Water Conservation

Today's scholarship increasingly views step wells as a form of TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE. Their designer's history has been adapted for seasonal water and fluctuating groundwater levels. Stepwells are two-dimensional manifestations of the cultural heritage of India. However, they can be interpreted as traditional responses to environmental issues. They can connect cultural tourism to environmental education, climate resilience and sustainable development.



Rani ki Vav and World Heritage

Rani-ki-Vav, a stepwell located in Patan, Gujarat, is known for its heritage and tourism potential. The inclusion of the site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014 under criteria (i) and (iv) demonstrates its architectural and technological significance. It is recognised to also demonstrate the link between conservation and tourism. Rising tourism will create awareness and funding resources for conservation, but unplanned traffic will exert physical pressure and environmental pressure. Visitor management and conservation planning must accompany heritage tourism.

Heritage management of Adalaj stepwell

Another important case for evaluating heritage management is Adalaj Stepwell. The unique architecture and closeness to major urban centres offer a good touristic potential. At the same time, its management illustrates the need for coordination between heritage authorities, tourism institutions, local communities, visitors and other stakeholders. The design of the building on the site has significant architectural value. Yet, this is not enough to guarantee a sustainable tourism strategy. All of these are equally important, namely interpretation, infrastructure, conservation, access, promotion and coordination.

Heritage tourism and Management of Heritage

According to McKercher and du Cros (2002), collaboration between cultural heritage management and tourism management is essential. Most Heritage Managers give priority to conservation and authenticity, whereas most Tourism Managers give priority to access and visitor experience and economic development. Achieving sustainable heritage tourism is not easy, but it is necessary. Du Cros (2001) developed a framework for sustainable cultural heritage tourism planning. This framework allows for the integration of heritage values into tourism planning. Gujarat's stepwells can be analysed through these theoretical lenses. Here, the question is not if these structures can attract tourists, but whether tourism can be developed without compromising heritage the values of these structures.

Sustainable Heritage Tourism essay

A growing area of research recognizes that sustainability encompasses many facets including, conservation, development, community, environment, visitor experience.

- Heritage tourism needs sustainability managed cultural heritage.
- management of visitors
- Load capacity analysis monitoring conservation;
- social engagement economic advantages within the locality;
- Accountable Rendering and Long-term Planning in Institutions

The participation of the community

Community involvement is becoming more and more clear as a key element in sustainable heritage tourism. Li and Hunter (2015) state that heritage tourism can be made sustainable through local participation, which will make the community owners. It is especially critical for stepwells located within or closer to settlements. Local residents can potentially participate as guides, artisans, entrepreneurs, cultural interpreters, hospitality providers and heritage volunteers. Thus, tourism planning should not view communities just as beneficiaries, but as stakeholders in heritage management.



Digital Heritage and Tourism

Digital technologies are changing the ways visitors engage with cultural heritage. (20 Words): You can present your heritage site digitally in a visitor-friendly manner with QR-based interpretation and digital storytelling. The documentation demonstrates the potential of technology for heritage conservation and interpretation. When stepwells are less known, digital approach can enhance their visibility and offer interpretation without any real physical interventions.

Deelimitation of Research

While there are numerous studies on the architecture, archaeology, history, water-management systems and cultural significance of stepwells, there is considerable research gap on their integrated potential as heritage tourism resource in Gujarat. The initial gap is the heritage-tourism gap. While much work has gone into the examination of the architecture and history of stepwells, a comparative lack of scholarship exists on the assessment of stepwells as tourism products.

The comparative gap is the second one. Most of the academic and tourism knowledge is focused on monuments like Rani-ki-Vav or Adalaj whereas, there is less research done on stepwells that are lesser known which are tourism-oriented. There is a disparity in how tourism is perceived. It is necessary to assess the attractiveness, authenticity, accessibility, interpretation, facilities, satisfaction, Revisit Intention / Recommend Intention of the tourists towards Stepwells. The fourth gap is that of community participation. Local communities' perception, expectations, participation and potential benefits of stepwell tourism have received little attention so far.

The fifth is a conservation and tourism gap. Tourism may help conservation through income and increased awareness; however, visitations, inappropriate infrastructure, commercialisation and physical contact may endanger fragile heritage structures. Therefore, we need an integrated assessment of this relationship. The sixth issue lies in the digital heritage divide. QR interpretation, virtual tours, augmented reality, 3D visualisation and digital storytelling can play a significant role in enhancing stepwell tourism which needs further empirical investigation.

The seventh gap is the sustainability gap. Previous discussions on the subject have not sufficiently integrated heritage conservation, visitor experience, local livelihoods, community participation, environmental education and destination management into a single framework suitable for Gujarat's stepwells. To fill these gaps, present study proposes Sustainable Stepwell Heritage Tourism Framework for Gujarat.

Statement Concerning the Difficulty

Gujarat has many step-wells which are of considerable historical, architectural, cultural and environmental significance, but their tourism use is uneven. Only a few stepwells of international significance have become well-known, while many less-known structures are beyond the existing tourism circuits.

The real challenge is not that we do not have heritage resources but the gap between heritage value and tourism use. This study intends to find out how stepwells can be developed as meaningful heritage tourism attractions without affecting their authenticity and physical fabric. The matters that have been evaluated include the tourist awareness, accessibility, interpretation, conservation, infrastructure, community participation, local economic benefit, digital promotion and sustainable management.

**The Study's Aim**

The purpose is to explore the prospects of selected stepwells in Gujarat as heritage tourism and to develop a sustainable framework for their conservation, interpretation, promotion, community participation and tourism development.

Purpose of the Study**The study aims to achieve the following objectives**

1. The main objective of the study is to find the significance of certain step wells in Gujarat.
2. To evaluate the current condition of stepwells identified as heritage tourism sites.
3. To assess level of awareness & perception of stepwell heritage by tourist?
4. We will look at the accessibility, infrastructure, interpretation, signage, safety and visitor facilities of selected sites.
5. To this end, the role of the government agencies, heritage organisations, tourism authorities and other stakeholders in stepwell management will be examined.
6. To examine the views and participation of local communities in heritage tourism development.
7. To identify major challenges affecting stepwell conservation and tourism development.
8. To study the potential of stepwell tourism in creating employment at the local level.
9. To examine the impact of digital technologies on stepwell heritage interpretation and popularization.
10. To formulate a sustainable heritage tourism framework for specific stepwells in Gujarat.
11. Testing of hypotheses.

The following hypotheses will be tested where data is quantifiable

- The study found a significant positive relationship between tourists' awareness of stepwell heritage and their visit intention.
- The tourists and local communities perceive architectural and aesthetic values of the stepwells have a significant positive effect on the stepwells tourism value.
- Tourists' satisfaction greatly depends on accessibility and visitor infrastructure.
- The visitor's experience is positively related to heritage interpretation.
- The perceived sustainability of stepwell tourism has a positive significant relationship with community participation.
- The intention of tourists to recommend on the basis of perceived authenticity of the stepwell heritage destinations.
- Digital representation and digital marketing influence tourists' interest in lesser-known stepwells.

Research Strategy**Methodology for Research**

The research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct the study. In this case, the mixed-method approach is the appropriate choice owing to both measurable components, tourist perceptions as well as non-measurable ones. These include the heritage significance, best conservation practices, community experiences, institutional management and cultural meaning.

**Research Methodology**

This research adopts a pragmatic research philosophy. The use of pragmatism is appropriate as the research problem requires the interplay of diverse evidence. Quantitative evidence can measure tourists' awareness, satisfaction, accessibility perceptions and behavioural intentions whereas qualitative evidence can provide insight into conservation-related challenges, community perceptions, institutional practices and heritage interpretation.

Research Strategy

The research design mainly exploratory, descriptive, comparative in nature. The study shall divide into four connected phases.

Phase I: Research Documentation and Literature

The initial phase is going to analyze.

- Literature of the past.
- Shut engineering
- archival materials
- Old systems of water- management.
- Documentation on heritage conservation
- tourism research.
- Travelling literature sustainable.
- tourism in community
- Policies Related to Government Tourism
- UNESCO report
- digital heritage programs

Phase II: Assessment of Heritage Sites

Certain step-wells shall be visited & documented systematically as per.

- architectural features
- Significance in history.
- body state
- surety;
- Environmental Surrounding
- Infrastructure for visitors.
- sign, signalling
- explanation.
- Protection
- neatness;
- transport system
- Tools that operate digitally.
- management of tourism.

Phase III: Gathering Firsthand Data



It will collect primary data from relevant stakeholder groups including.

- travellers and sightseers
- Nearby community
- Experts in travel and tourism
- The experts on heritage.
- Experts in Conservation
- architects;
- Geographical tour guides
- Public Servants.
- Officials managing tourism programs.
- -relevant others that stakeholders

Phase IV: Data Assessment and Framework Design

The quantitative and qualitative findings will be synthesized to evaluate the tourism potential of selected stepwells and to develop a Sustainable Stepwell Heritage Tourism Framework for the state of Gujarat.

Techniques to Gather Data

Secondary Data

We will acquire some secondary information.

- literature.
- Articles published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Publications by Government
- Records: Archaeological Survey of India
- Document of Ministry Tourism
- Documentation of UNESCO.
- Publications of Gujarat Tourism
- reports on heritage handling
- Archival items
- Scholarly works and submissions for the doctoral degree.
- Trustworthy repositories of digital heritage.

Core Data

The main information will be gathered by.

- organized questionnaires
- Semi-Structured Interviews
- Field Observation
- Camera Imaging records.
- the scheduling of a site assessment
- meetings with stakeholders

Sampling refers to the act of selecting a portion or a subset of a whole. This section specifically refers to the methods used in choosing a sample. There are many types of sampling methods. In sampling



methods, you can either use a probability or non-probability method. Sampling provides convenience and accuracy, making data collection easier. In research, sampling refers to the selection of a sample from a larger population. The sample should ideally be the representative of the larger population. In social psychology research, sampling becomes essential mostly when the target audience is large. The easiest example of sampling is one done by a market researcher. He or she selects a sample of the entire population for their research study of the market.

The researcher will analyze whether the larger population behaves similarly to the sample. In other words, researchers mostly make the assumption. This assumption states that if the sample provides helpful data, the larger population might also behave similarly.

Why Do Sampling?

The main purpose of sampling is to get the desired research outcome. In other words, it makes data collection easier and more efficient. If the researcher has control over the sample, they will never choose their sample randomly. They will always pick their sample purposefully. When the researcher does not have control over the sample, they will choose a random sample. A purposive sampling strategy may be used for selecting representative step-wells based on the following criteria.

- Importance of History
- Architectural Importance
- Recognition of Heritage.
- Tourists' Attraction Visibility.
- Representing of a region
- affordability
- The state of conservation.
- User interaction and device usage.
- possibility for tourism growing.

An appropriate sample size for the tourist survey may be determined using standard statistical techniques. To get diverse perspective, different categories of respondents may be included. A comparative approach should optimally include both Recognized sights. Rani Ki Vav, Adalja Vav and Dada Harir Vav. Uncommon Step wells. Our team identified the chosen sites from archaeological records, government documentation, field surveys and expert consultation

Study variables

The quantitative part can look at relations among the following variables.

Stand-alone variables

- Cultural heritage recognition
- Visual appeal - aesthetics
- approachability.
- Quality of interpretation
- Visitor facilities
- Veracity
- Online Interaction
- Contributions of Society



Dependent Factors

- Tourist satisfaction
- Want to go through this again.
- Willingness to recommend.
- Understood tourism worth.
- Sustainability perceived

These variables can then be tested with the right statistics.

Information Evaluation

Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques may be employed to analyse quantitative data.

- certainly frequency
- percentage
- average
- Variability measure
- Investigation of Relationships
- Statistical regression process.
- T-test.
- Analysis of variance
- other suitable statistical methods based on the final research design.

The interviews and observational notes will be subjected to thematic analysis. Possible more academic option: Important topics may appear.

- Importance of Heritage.
- protection
- Guest experience
- community involvement
- local governance
- Opportunities in tourism.
- obstacles
- Digital analysis and usage.
- sustainable

The quantitative and qualitative data will complement each other to assess the tourism potential of stepwells.

Theoretical Framework

The planned study conceptualizes stepwell tourism through four interlinked dimensions.

Cultural Significance.

Historical significance, Architectural value, Artistic value, Cultural meaning and Environmental knowledge.

↓.

Appeal of tourism.

Recognition, access, understanding, amenities, authenticity and digital involvement are the first hurdles.

↓.



Social and Economic Aspect.

Local entrepreneurship, employment opportunities, cultural continuity and economic benefits all begin with community participation.



Heritage Tourism Sustainable

Visitor management contributes to environmental sustainability and long-term protection of heritage. The framework recognises that tourism development cannot be treated in isolation from conservation and community welfare.

Importance of the study

The study is important from academic, cultural, tourism, environmental and socio-economic perspectives.

Importance of Studies

The research merges history, architecture, heritage management, tourism, environmental studies and community development, contributing to the literature. The study could help the public realize the tourism value of stepwells, making them more supportive of conservation and use.

Development of tourism: The study can help diversifying the tourist bouquet of Gujarat by making stepwells a thematic heritage tourism site.

Development of Local Economy: Responsible tourism has the potential to generate opportunities for local guides, artisans, transport providers, food businesses, accommodation providers and cultural entrepreneurs.

Ecological Education: Stepwells can help communicate past approaches to water conservation and adaptation to climate change.

Destination Design: Network of stepwells can help create a thematic heritage circuit and strengthen destination branding of Gujarat.

Digital Legacy: Digital technologies can improve interpretation, accessibility, education and promotion and the research can recommend the same.

Problems in Making Stepwell Tourism: Stepwells may face several difficulties that hinder them from being tourist spots.

Challenges of conservation: Several factors threaten heritage structures like age, weathering, structural deterioration, pollution and more.

Limited Awareness: Many less popular stepwells do not attract much tourist attention.



Inaccurate Explanation: Not having sufficient signs, historic information, multilingual interpretation and trained guides and educational materials may hamper the understanding of visitors.

Community Involvement: Tourism may not bring adequate economic or social benefits to local communities without meaningful participation.

Commercialization: Excessive marketing and commercialisation may distort the authenticity and visual quality of heritage environments.

Sustainable Tourism Prospects

The research suggests few possible propositions for sustainable stepwell tourism.

1. Heritage stepwell circuits based on thematic development.
2. Heritage Tours
3. Local heritage guides received training.
4. Interpretation based on QR codes.
5. Information panels in multiple languages
6. augmented-reality experiences
7. Virtual exploration.
8. Three-dimensional digital records.
9. Educational programs and heritage celebrations
10. Community-based tourism companies
11. Local handicraft promotion
12. Assessment of carrying capacity.
13. Plans for managing visitors
14. Profits from tourism linked to conservation.
15. Marketing of lesser-known sites using digital methods.
16. Ongoing surveillance of legacy situations.

The aim should not only be to increase visitor numbers but to meet longer-term objectives such as creating a balanced tourism system where conservation visitor experience, community welfare and economic development. It is proposed to plan a sustainable stepwell heritage tourism framework. The framework proposed in this study consists of six pillars.

Conservation of Heritage: Restoration monitoring, Risk management, Authenticity protection, Documentation

Pillar two: Visitor Experience: Safety, Amenities, Heritage education, Interpretation, Accessibility.

Community Participation: Pillar 3: Guidance from locals leads to entrepreneurial opportunities and job creation.

Component 4: Digital Heritage

QR codes, virtual tours, AR and VR, digital storytelling and digital promotion.

Pillar Five: Sustainable Destination Management.



Management of visitors, environmental management, responsible tourism, carrying capacity.

Pillar 6: Governance and Collaborations.

Agencies is the most common term used for the five aforementioned players in the tourism sector. Integrating these six pillars can rewrite the narrative of stepwells from being an isolated monument to a sustainable heritage tourism site.

Delimitations of the Study

The study can have several limitations. Since Gujarat has a huge number of stepwells, it may not be practically possible to study each of the structures within the limitations of time and resources of a research project. As a result, the study's analysis relies on carefully selected representative sites. Documentation for lesser-known stepwells may be limited in terms of their historical, architectural, archaeological, or conservation status.

Due to their location, physical condition, ownership, security restrictions and insufficient means of transport, certain sites may be difficult to access. The perception of tourists may differ from season to season and tourist to tourist depending on their age, educational background, travel motivation, exposure to the heritage destination in the past and other social factors. Consequently, the data gathered in a specific fieldwork period may not adequately reflect users' perceptions throughout the year.

There might be limited availability of government officials, heritage professionals, conservation specialists and other stakeholders for a possible interview. Not all information on spending on conservation, visitors, decisions by institutions and management practices is public. Besides the detailed stepwells structural engineering study, the research assesses tourism potential of stepwells.

At last, heritage tourism is an active field. After fieldwork completion, government policies, infrastructure, visitor behaviour, digital technologies and tourism promotion strategies are likely to change. Efforts will be made to overcome these limitations by using numerous techniques which include gathering documentary evidence, field observation, quantitative data, qualitative interviews and comparative case studies.

Conclusion

Gujarat's stepwells are a remarkable amalgam of water-managing technology, architecture, sculpture, religious symbolism, social history, environmental facilitation and cultural identity. Not only did they serve as sources of groundwater, they also show the innovative exchange between human communities and their environment. Rani-ki-Vav is irrefutable evidence of the outstanding universal value of Gujarat's stepwell tradition, while the Adalaj Stepwell and Dada Harir in Vav testify to the continued architectural and cultural relevance of this heritage. Many lesser-known stepwells are not being used in the tourism industry at the same time.

The argument of this paper is that stepwell tourism should not be seen merely as a mechanism to increase tourist footfall. Instead, it has to evolve as a form of heritage tourism that is conservation-oriented, community-inclusive, educational and technologically enabled and environmentally responsible. The use of conservation, interpretation, accessibility, visitor management, digital technology, community participation and local economic development can provide a sustainable pathway to strengthening stepwell tourism in Gujarat. Thematic heritage circuits, heritage walks, digital platforms, educational programmes and community-based tourism initiatives can connect the lesser-known stepwells.



The Sustainable Stepwell Heritage Tourism Framework detailed above can thus serve as a conceptual–practical model for policymakers, tourism authorities, heritage professionals, conservation organisations, researchers and local communities. If used appropriately, Gujarat’s stepwells can serve as living pedagogies linking ancient water wisdom with current discussions on cultural preservation, climate resilience, sustainable tourism and local development rather than merely being historical monuments.

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