



Evaluating Tourist experience and infrastructure at Rock Cut Temple Masroor, Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated tourists' experience and infrastructure at the Rock Cut Temple Masroor, Himachal Pradesh. This site is less known but has a significant heritage. This temple attracts approximately 42000 tourists annually. Using a structures questionnaire and field visit data, information was collected from 49 visitors through an online platform. Targeting the individuals who have previously visited. Findings reveal that the majority of tourists are young, local visitors aged between 18-30. Mostly visitors visit the temple for the religious purpose. Most respondents rated their overall experience satisfactory. While basic facilities such as drinking water and toilets are available, field observations show the inadequacy of the shaded area and information boards. The majority of the visitors visit the site using their personal vehicle due to limited public transport access to the site. While the field visit identified various issues, including poor drainage of pond water, stagnation of water, and construction restrictions under the AMASR act, which create challenges to the tourism, the study recommends various steps like provision of shaded areas, audio guides, increasing public transport, proper drainage of pond water, installation of solar-powered fountains, and setting up of food kiosks at the site. These steps enhance tourism, preserve culture, and boost the local economy while safeguarding the site.

Keywords: Heritage, Masroor, infrastructure, sustainable, visitors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the bulwark of Himachal Pradesh's economy, contributing significantly to the State Gross Domestic Product 6.99 percent by Trade, Hotel & Restaurant (SGDP) in 2023-24. The state attracts a diverse range of tourists, including intra-state, inter-state, and international visitors. This widespread appeal is largely due to Himachal Pradesh's unique geophysical diversity, rich socio-cultural heritage and its revered status as Dev Bhumi—The Land of Gods in Hindu mythology.

Tourism in Himachal Pradesh is multifaceted, a significant proportion of tourists visit the state for Religious and Spiritual Tourism, attracted by its ancient temples, shrines and pilgrimage circuits. Adventure Tourism is equally prominent, with opportunities for trekking, river rafting, paragliding, and mountaineering in the Himalayas. Cultural and Heritage Tourism draws visitors to historic towns, traditional festivals, and architectural marvels. In recent years, Wellness and Yoga Tourism has gained popularity due to the serene environment and presence of spiritual retreats. Additionally, Rural and Village Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, and Snow and Winter Tourism further enrich the tourism landscape of Himachal Pradesh, making it a year-round destination.

The Masroor Rock Cut Temple is a unique monolithic sandstone structure located in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. It was constructed in the early 8th century CE, during the post-Gupta period. The name "Masroor," believed to be of Mughal origin, is derived from an Arabic word meaning "Joyful" or "full of happiness." The temple complex is oriented towards the northeast, facing the majestic Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas. Unlike most temple architectures in Himachal Pradesh, which typically follow Shikhara, Pagoda, and Pahari styles, the Masroor Temple is built in the Nagara style and is dedicated to Lord Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita, who occupy the sanctum sanctorum. A sacred water tank, as prescribed in ancient Hindu texts, is also part of the complex. Often referred to as the "Ellora of North India," the temple features intricately carved caves and sculpted walls, drawing parallels with the famed Ajanta and Ellora cave temples of Maharashtra.

The temple complex was first reported by Henny Shuttlesworth in 1913. After that it kept under the Indian archeology survey of India. After that it came to attention to the archaeologist. According to Michael Meister, who were an art historian and a professor specializing in Indian temple architecture, the Masroor temple is a surviving example of a temple mountains- style Hindu architecture which embodied the earth and mountains around it.

The Masroor rock cut temple is about 45 km southwest of the Dharamshala and 35 km west from the kanga town this temple is located in the Beas River valley. The nearest Railway station is Nagrota Surian which is about 11 km. and nearest airport is Dharamshala (DHM). This study is focused on the various challenges faced by the tourists at this site.

This temple is a central attraction for the various local tourists as well as foreign tourists. Most of people visited like some are the pilgrimage tourists and some are the excursionists. According to the RTI data from Archeological Survey of India Masroor rock cut temple recorded a total footfall of 51826 Indian tourist and 1328 foreign tourists, this footfall from 1st April 2024 to June 2025. Indicating its growing prominence as a religious and heritage tourism site in the region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Meister in the first half of eighth century, Indian craftsmen cut a high ridge of sandstone and curved a temple complex facing toward Dhauldhar ranges of Himalayas. Some parts of this temple are damaged by the earthquake. Meister also argued that some of the scholars ignoring this site but this site is an international level architecture. This temple offers unique insight into medieval Indians notions and cosmology.

Vikas verma, Rakesh Ahlawat, Mandeep Ghai and Sanjeev Bansal (2024) studied the importance of rural tourism in enhancing the function of tourism as in rural tourism local communities are involved. They examined the state of rural tourism in Himachal Pradesh, use the document analysis interviews with various groups, and stakeholders in discussions. Challenges and trends in rural tourism in Himachal Pradesh are also accessed. Further the study evaluated the current marketing structure of Himachal Pradesh concerning rural tourism products. Findings of the research highlight the need to establish a comprehensive framework for rural tourism at both state and national level. Also suggested that implementation of integrated provisions in marketing and regional legislation.

Zhu, y. (2021) studied that heritage tourism, is rapidly growing is deeply concerning with political and ethical challenges . This study explores how it can reinforce hegemonic narratives nationalism and colonial ideologies that affect the minorities and indigenous communities. Heritage tourism has also the potential to challenge those issues by promoting storytelling, local empowerments and community led governance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design, which aimed at understanding tourist's experiences, challenges and tourist's satisfaction at Masroor Rock, cut Temple. A combination of quantitative, qualitative and observational methods was used.

The observations presented in this paper are field visit conducted by author during July 2025, which represent the behavior of the tourist's maintenance of the site, and nearby infrastructure.

3.2 Study Area



Figure 1

Source:

<https://www.ancientpages.com/category/archaeol>

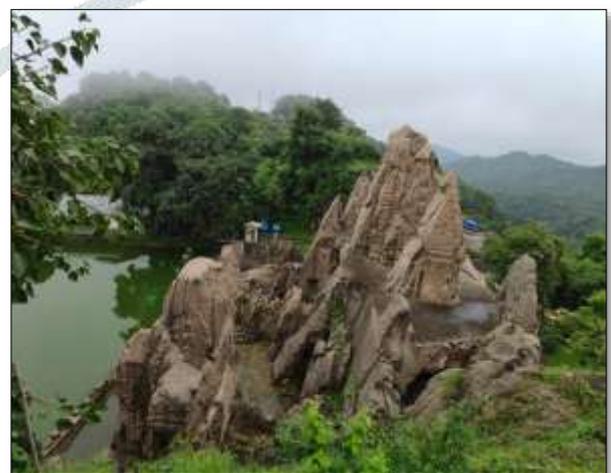


Figure 2: Masroor Rock Cut temple



Fig 3: sculpture on wall



Fig4 : Preserved Stone carvings and architectural fragments

The research conducted at Masroor Rock Cut Temple, located in Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh having latitude 32.100007 N and longitude 76.269993 E. It is a site of historic and architectural significance visited by local domestic and foreigner tourists.

3.3 Source of Data

3.3.1 Primary Data

A structured Google form questionnaire was designed and distributed through various social media platforms among the tourists visiting the temple.

The survey includes, purpose of visit, travel mode, road condition, cleaning of the site, basic amenities, and overall experience of the tourists.

3.3.2 Observation- Based insights

As the researcher is resident of Masroor, so researcher is able to observe various aspects of the study like tourist’s footfall, cleanliness, accessibility of transportation, road conditions, availability of restaurants and local views.

3.3.3 Secondary Data

As this monument is centrally protected and maintained by Shimla archeological survey of India in Himachal Pradesh. They have provided the data of Tourists visited by filing a Right to Information (RTI) on the basis of tickets.

Table 1.1 details of visitors during the period of 2024-25 and 2025-26

Reply of RTI No. ALSOI/R/E/25/00570						
Sr. no.	Year	Indian visitors	foreign visitors	Bimstec visitors	SAARC visitors	Total
1.	2024-25	41387	1096	-	-	42483
2.	2025-26 up to June 2025	10439	232	0	0	10671
Reply of RTI No. ALSOI/R/E/25/00570						
Sr. no.	Month	Indian visitors	foreign visitors	Bimstec visitors	SAARC visitors	total
1.	May 2025	2964	69	-	-	3033

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section the analysis of primary data collected from the questionnaire made on Google form. The form consists of 14 questionnaires. Total 49 responses were received from visitors to the Masroor Rock cut Temple. The Responses were analyzed and interpreted using table for each question.

Table: 2

Q 1. Your Age Group		
group	pondents	centage %
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ve 50		
al		00

The age group data presented in above table in which age group is categorized in four categories viz. <18; 18-30; 31-50; >50. Data shows that maximum visitors are between the age of 18-30 year having share of 83.67% followed by 31–50-year ages group contribute 8.16 %. This shows that to younger tourists are more interesting to visit Rock cut Temple Masroor.

Table: 3

Q.2 Which type of visitor international, domestic, locals		
Visitors type	Respondents	Percentage %
Internationals	-	-
Domestic	15	30.61
Locals	34	69.38
other	-	-
Total	49	100.00

The table 3 presents the questionnaire and categories the visitor in four types viz. internationals, demotic locals and other. Locals refers to peoples of Masroor who visit and domestic are either interstate or intra state visitors. Data clearly shows the dominance of locals as they share 69.38% followed by domestic visitors having share of 30.61 %. Whereas; the no data of international tourist is recorded during the study because they account only about the 1% of total share of visitors per year as per the RTI.

Table: 4

Q.3 Types of Tourists		
Purpose of visit	Respondents	Percentage %
Religious	33	67.34
Tourists	10	20.40
Photography	5	10.20
other	1	2.04
Total	49	100.00

Under this table the data represent the purpose of visits the data shows the religious tourist dominancy as they contribute 67.34 %. Temple is built in the Nagara style and is dedicated to Lord Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita, who occupy the sanctum sanctorum some local people, called it Thakurdwara.



Fig 5: Garbhagriha of the temple

Table: 5

Q.4 how did you reach Masroor Rock cut Temple		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
Personal vehicle	35	71.42
Public Transport	6	12.24
On foot	8	16.32
Hired Taxi	0	0.00
Total	49	100.00

As shown in above Table and figure, the most of the visitors 71.42% prefer their personal vehicle, 12.24% use public transport, 16.32% on foot, and none of the visitor use hired taxi from the data it's clear that the public transportation and taxi service is limited.

Table: 6

Q.5 how would you rate the condition of the road leading to the temple		
Rating	Respondents	Percentage %
1 (Poor)	3	6.12
2	8	16.32
3	21	42.85
4	11	22.44
5 (Excellent)	6	12.24
Total	49	100.00

From above table it is evident that majority of tourist rate the road condition 3 means the average condition of the road, but more than 22 percent tourists rate the road conditions below average. So, it's clear that the condition of road leading to Rock cut Temple is average.

Table: 7

Q.6 Was it easy to locate the temple (signboards, maps, direction)?		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
yes	42	85.71
no	1	2.04
Maybe	6	12.24
Total	49	100.00

From above table it's clear that 85.71% tourist respond that they can easily locate the temple and very few 2% respond that they didn't locate the temple easily. This is clear that there are sufficient signboards and maps access to easy locate the temple.

Table: 8

Q.7 Are basic facilities (toilets, drinking water, dustbins) available?		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
yes	40	81.63
no	3	6.12
Inadequate	6	12.24
Total	49	100.00

From above table it's found that 82% tourists responds that the basic facilities like toilet drinking water and dustbins are available and very few tourists 6% responds that non availability of basic facilities and 12 percent tourists responds in the favor that basic facilities are inadequate.

Table: 9

Q.8 Is there any resting area, seating space, or shaded place available?		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
yes	32	65.30
no	8	16.32
may be	9	18.36
Total	49	100.00

From table no 9, it's evident that resting area and seating place is available at Rock cut Temple Masroor as more than 65% visitors responds and very few 16% responds that no such things are available, but 19% are not sure about the availability of resting area seating space or shaded place. But as per observation there is lack of shaded place at the site.

Table: 10

Q.9 Did you find information boards or guide at the site.		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
yes	31	63.26
no	8	16.32
not provided the complete information	10	20.40
Total	49	100.00

From Above Table it's evident that there are information boards and Guides are available at the site as more than 63% visitors responds, very few respondents respond 16% that there are no information and guide available and 21% responds that the information boards guide not provided the complete information. But in actual observation there are very limited information board available at the site and no guides are available at Rock cut Temple Masroor.

Table: 11

Q.10 Are there any food or refreshment options nearby?		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
yes	31	63.26
no	5	10.20
very few	13	26.53
Total	49	100.00

From the survey data (table No10 and figure 10) 63% of tourists responds that there is food or refreshment options are available, 10% said no such options are available. But 27% responds that there are very few refreshments and food option available nearby the site. However, during field observation, it was found that there are very few foods and refreshment stalls available at the site.

Table: 12

Q.11 How would you rate the cleanliness of the site		
Rating	Respondents	Percentage %
1 (poor)	3	6.12
2	2	4.08
3	10	20.40
4	16	32.65
5 (excellent)	18	36.73
Total	49	100.00

From above table and figure, it's evident that the cleanliness of the Masroor Rock cut Temple is above average as 20.40% tourist's rate the cleanliness rating 3. Whereas, 32.65% tourists' rate 4 and 36.73% give the rating of 5 very few tourists rate the cleanliness of the site below average. Therefore, the cleanliness of the site is above average.

Table No 13

Q.12 is temple structure is properly maintained or preserved?		
Response	Respondents	Percentage %
yes	31	63.26
no	8	16.32
not sure	10	20.40
Total	49	100.00

From above Table and figure found that more than 63% tourists respond yes that the temple structure is properly maintained and preserved very few respondents 16% respond no and 21% are not sure. Therefore, it's clear that the temple structure is properly maintained.

Table: 14

Q.13 How satisfy are you with your visit?		
Rating	Respondents	Percentage %
1 (Dissatisfied)	2	4.08
2	2	4.08
3	12	24.48
4	19	38.77
5 (High)	14	28.57
Total	49	100.00

From above table and figure its show the satisfaction level of the tourists at Rock cut temple Masroor, from the above data 24.48% tourists rate the satisfaction level as 3. 38.77% rate 4 and 28.57% rate 5. Very few 4.08% tourist rate the satisfaction level 1 and 2, hence it's clear that the satisfaction level of the tourists at Rock Cut Temple is above average.

Table: 15

Q.14 Would you recommend others to visit Rock cut temple Masroor?		
Response	count	Percentage
yes	45	91.83
no	1	2.04
may be	3	6.12
Total	49	100.00

From above table approximately 92% visitors respond that they recommend other people to visit the Rock Cut Temple Masroor. This reflects a positive experience of the visitors.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 The findings of the study from the collected data from visitors,

Majority of the respondents are of the age group 18-30 years, shows that youth are particularly attracted towards the site. Most of the respondents (around 69%) are local, followed by the domestic tourists, and no international tourist was reported. Religious interest was the main reason for visiting the temple then followed by tourism and Photography.

Temple is easy to locate as 86% visitors agreed that site was easy to locate through available signboards and directions. The condition of the road leading to the temple is average. Majority of the people (more than 70%) travelled through their personal vehicle which indicates the limited availability of the public transport and taxi service in the area.

Basic facilities like toilets, water and dustbins were available 60% reported the presence of food stalls, field observation showed the options were limited and basic. Similarly, although some tourists responded information boards and guide are available, but on-site observation found information boards not provide complete information and non-availability of guides.

Cleanliness and maintenance of the temple structures were preserved and more than 90% recommend others to visit the temple. The overall satisfaction of the tourists was good.

5.2 Findings from field visit

5.2.1 Developmental and construction issue

According to the Ancient Monument and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) rules, no construction is allowed within 100 meters of the Masroor temple. Because of this, there aren't any government-run canteens, refreshment stalls, or cafeterias nearby. But during the study, we noticed that a government senior secondary school is still located close to the temple. The school building is in very poor condition and looks unsafe for the students. Although the school was supposed to be moved to a new location due to the construction restrictions, it's still functioning there, which poses a serious risk to the children's safety.



Fig 6: Government Senior Secondary School Masroor

5.2.2 Poor drainage system and polluted pond water

The temple, built in the traditional Nagar style, is located beside a pond that collects rainwater but suffers from poor water management. Water often accumulates around the temple's base (Figure 7), threatening the sandstone structure. The pond supports fish, but during the dry summer months, stagnant and no circulation of water leads to high pollution levels, especially increased Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), which is proves fatal to fishes. Lack of water movement causes oxygen depletion, algae growth on the surface, and waste buildup at the bottom, resulting in foul odors. During heavy rains, the overflowing pond floods the temple corridors (Figure 8), creating slippery conditions that inconvenience visitors and raise safety concerns.



Fig. 7 Accumulation of water

Fig 8 Polluted Pond Water

5.2.3 Ecotourism

During the visit, it was observed that the temple authorities have embraced eco-friendly practices. They have installed rooftop solar panels to harness solar energy, which powers the focused lighting around the temple at night.



Fig 9: Rooftop solar panel

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Development of integrated/ tourism advancement plan:** This place is a central attraction, surrounded by numerous religious and adventure tourism spots such as the Guler province, Kangra Fort, Ramsar site wetlands, Pong Dam—which offers boating and scenic views of migratory birds—along with renowned temples like Kangra Devi, Jwalamukhi, and Chamunda Devi. Given this rich tourism potential, it is essential for the government to develop a comprehensive and integrated tourism advancement plan. This plan should aim to interlink all these sites into a unified

tourism circuit by improving transportation networks i.e. public transport facility, enhancing basic amenities, setting up rest houses and deploying digital tourist information centers includes.

- **Allowing Infrastructure Development:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has banned all construction within the Masroor Rock Cut Temple nearby, including on privately owned land. While this restriction aims to protect the monument, it has caused frustration among local residents who feel disconnected from their heritage and restricted in how they can use their own land. This sometimes discourages community participation in preserving the site and weakens their motivation to care for the monument. Given the deep religious and cultural significance of the temple and the fact that it attracts over 42,000 visitors annually, there is a clear need for basic tourism infrastructure.
- **Rural employment generation and inclusive growth:** The temple provides the huge potential for the rural employment generation which helps to build the rural economy and promote the inclusive development. As this attracts over the 42000 tourists per year which clearly shows potential for rural economy generation. Therefore, the government should consider permitting eco-friendly, sustainable developments—like *bamboo huts for lodging and small, locally operated restaurants*—under regulations and prior approval. Such controlled development would encourage responsible tourism, create jobs, and boost the local economy, all while safeguarding the monument's heritage.
- **Drainage and Pond Water Management:** The stagnant water accumulating around the outside of the temple due to poor drainage poses a serious threat, but unfortunately, this issue has been overlooked by the authorities. There should be a proper drainage system in place to channel this water away. Additionally, the pond water needs to be regularly replenished with fresh water. Installing a solar-powered fountain system in the pond would help aerate the water, increasing oxygen levels for the fish, while also enhancing the pond's visual appeal for tourists.
- **Non-relocation of the school:** According to Hindu beliefs, schools are often considered like temples. This school is still in function but the authority has planned to relocate to another place which is far away from this monument. The school is located at the heart of a major tourist site that attracts a diverse group of visitors—including foreign tourists (about 1%), as well as inter-state and intra-state travelers, totaling 41,387 visitors according to RTI records. This interaction with tourists provides students with valuable exposure to different cultures and languages. As a local, I have observed that many villagers are unhappy with the idea of relocating the school. Most of them want the school to remain in its current location because it plays an important role in the community and supports cultural exchange.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This temple is monolithic and carved out of sandstone, a sedimentary rock that is highly susceptible to environmental degradation. Historical events, such as the devastating earthquake of 1905, have caused significant structural damage, as Kangra district lies under zone-v in earthquake prone area. Additionally, local accounts claim that the authorities have used chemical bleaching agents during cleaning operations, which may have accelerated the deterioration of intricate sculptures. Therefore, it is important to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the temple's conservation status, considering both natural and anthropogenic threats, to ensure its long-term preservation.

The study reveals that the Rock cut Temple Masroor holds good religious and cultural value, especially, among young tourists, most of the visitor's expressed satisfaction with the site's cleanliness maintains, and accessibility. However, the lack of public transport, food options, guides and basic infrastructure like shaded seating were highlighted. Despite of these gaps 90% of tourists recommend others to visit the site, indicating an overall positive experience. Tourism can be boost at the site by enhancing visitor's facilities. There are restrictions for constructions under AMSAR rule which protect the heritage site but limit the food and refreshment options. For the concern of safety there is lack of protective fence in front of temple pond and poor drainage of pond water during monsoon season which cause slippery corridor and inconvenient for tourists.

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