

Special Landscape Of Jaisalmer Desert Tourist Circuit

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Abstract: The building material was a boon to the Jaisalmer architects, provided by nature of the local variety of fine grained buff and yellow sand stone, the region abounds in, the latter, a choicest shade, predominantly used in monuments of medieval period was particularly suited to the desert landscape. A formation of Jurassic age this best available variety locally known as “pun patthar” had been quarried from Kanadi, Moolsagar and Jethwai, all within the vicinity of the capital city which still meet the local demand for construction of houses.

Keywords: Building material, architects, monuments, landscape, pun patthar

SPECIAL LANDSCAPE OF JAISALMER DESERT TOURIST CIRCUIT

Desert tourist circuit of Jaisalmer is constituted by five main tourist sites. These are Jaisalmer, Akal, Khuri, Lodrava and Sam as described below:

(i) Mool Sagar

Situated 8 K.M. west of Jaisalmer, this is another pleasant, but rather neglected, small garden and tank. It belongs to the Royal family of Jaisalmer and was originally built as a cool summer retreat. The major attraction of this place is a Shiva temple, which is said to be constructed out of just two large blocks of sandstones.

Maharawal Moolraj II built the Moolsagar complex in 1815 AD. You will find numerous wells, the Moolsagar Garden and a splendid Raj Mahal built on its premises. Maharaja Moolsagar was known for his patronage to art and artisans and that becomes pretty evident when you come across some great murals on the palace walls. He definitely had a considerable influence on the wazirs and land-lords. Therefore his patronage to the art and architecture was resonated among his nobles and subjects. It was mainly due to his efforts that so many lovely palaces and structures were built in that period which was influenced by both the Mughal and Rajput schools of art.

(ii) Kuldhara

Kuldhara village is 18 km to the west of Jaisalmer. This is among the 84 villages inhabited by the prosperous, hardworking Paliwals. Established by the Kuldhar sub-caste of Paliwal Brahmins in the year 1291, it was once a prosperous village with 600 houses.

Kuldhara is a calm place and the ruins found around are examples of advanced sculpture and architecture. Most of the houses are double storied and are not affected by thunder or heat. Paliwals deserted these houses owing to several reasons. Their one time richness can be seen in the wells, water tanks, temples and cenotaphs.

(iii) Dedha

It was a Paliwal village, but now Hindu, Muslim, Rajputs and Carpenters are living here. The house of the village are traditional painted with clay, front door with statue of Ganesha, wooden horses (for good luck), are of tourist attraction. In marriages traditional Toaran were made.

(iv) Gadsisar tank

Before introduction of tap water this was the main source of water supply to the township. It is the biggest natural water reservoir with a vast catchment area spreading in several square miles. Maharawal Ghadsi or Ghad Simha developed the surroundings of this natural reservoir by strengthening the embankment in V.S. 1391 (A.D. 1334) and hence called after him.

In subsequent period several structures came up along the north-western fringe of the tank, of which, the imposing gateway raised by one “Tilo” ‘a prostitute of Jaisalmer in memory of her overlord, the Maharawal is of the highest interest. The structure providing entrance to the lake for the towns- people stands majestically overlooking the fine sheet of water. Among the three rounded arched openings the middle is wider enough for passing a sizable camel cart or a truck. Whereas the flanking openings are smaller and lower in height. Of this double storey structure, two lower chambers with overhanging “tiwari” type windows are just above the side openings accessible through flight of steps on flanked. On upper storey is again a centrally located overhanging gokhra (window) of similar shape but quite bigger in size supported on arched pillars with intricate jali work on “takia” Two more flanking window-openings, one on either side. maintain perfect symmetry. On both the sides attached to the main mass rise octagonal, bastion-like structures of equal height each topped by a chatri, as usual supported on octagon of pillars. The roof, except a centrally located chamber with square a vagon shaped top, is flat provided with railing all around.

A multistoreyed pillared structure crowned by a chatri just in the middle of the lake adds further to the attraction of the, whole composition. With stepped platforms the structure, like a boat floating in water is a befitting place to enjoy during rains.

Structures along the Gadsisar tank on north and comprising mostly chhatris, dwelling houses a and few temples are all modern. Gajendreshwar .Mahadev is the solitary example which may, any how, be reckoned in the list of archaeological interest.

The shrine facing east, as stated in the inscription fixed there, is a middle 19th century structure consecrated formally, during the reign of Maharawal Gaj Singh in V.S. 1905 (AD. 1848) on Jyestha Shukla 8, Friday and is, even now, the property of the ex-Maharawal.

The over all plan of the temple is almost square, constituting a square sanctum, enclosed by an ambulatory and a covered mandap’ on twelve arched pillars of square shape-the whole enclosed by walls giving from outside a box like appearance. Roof is flat,

provided with fences all along the fringe. Inside, besides the lingam finds installation of the modern figures of Shiv, Ganesh and Parvati.

(v) Bara bagh

This is a beautiful tourism spot only 8 km away from Jaisalmer on Ramgarh road. Like Amarsagar and Mool sagar a bundh (Dam) exists here known as Jet bandh which was named after Maharawal Jait Singh who got it constructed in V.S. 1570 (A.D) 1513). The spot is so deep from the surrounding area that one has to climb down sufficiently to reach the water point. Attached to the bundh on other side is an orchard of mango and other fruits.

On a low 'hillock to the south east of the orchard is the cremation ground of the royal house of Jaisalmer. Here exist chhatris over the mortal remains of the past Maharawals of the state-most of them in very bad state of preservation. Each chhatri preserves inside an inscribed tablet recording the death date of the Maharawal in whose memory the memorial is raised. These records are conclusive in fixing the dates of the Maharawals who flourished after shifting of the Bhati capital to Jaisalmer.

These chhatris have been raised on a set pattern although differing in size. They stand essentially on high platform and in more than most cases on octagon of ornamental pillars resembling the popular 17th-18th Century fluted type with arches. Roof is domical and ribbed, raised above a projected chajjika all around. Those which have a gigantic plan are attached to with additional pillared porch on four cardinal sides canopied by semi circular projections. Above the bandh on way to the chhatris stands a temple to Kshetrapal in highly dilapidated condition possibly of 16th century.

Akal wood fossil park

Akal is situated about 17 kilometer away from Jaisalmer along the road to Barmer as shown in Fig. 3.3 and photo plate 3.3. This park is of great importance by geography as well as geology point of view and also for archaeologists. One can easily reach Akal either by Taxi or Jeep or any other private Four Wheelers.

Akal wood fossils park located at Jaisalmer spreads over 21 hectare. It is assumed that this park has an age of about 180 million years. Akal Wood is a fossil park where once stood a dense green forest 180 millions years ago. The area then got submersed under the sea and the tree trunks ended up being preserved in the form of fossils. When the sea receded over time due to subsequent geological activities causing the present sandy basin, these fossils came to the force. This is a natural real wonder and the whole area is protected and preserved presently due to its archaeological worth. It is believed that more fossils are lying in deep and still excavations are going on in this region.

In that geological era there were only non-flowering trees. Therefore the wood fossils are considered to represent gymnosperms like Chir, deodar or red wood of lower Jurassic age. The presence of these gigantic trees suggests this desert terrain of today once had a humid climate which supported a luxuriant forest.

Today fossil trunks lie scattered in this park along with centuries old sea shells. This includes fossilized tree trunks of various sizes, with the largest being 13 meters (43 feet) in length and 1.5 meters (5 feet) in width. Enormous fossilized tree trunks and centuries old sea shells are significant specimens of the geological history of the Indian deserts. The largest specimen of the fossil obtained is of size 7 m by 1.5 m. This is an ideal tourist spot for geological and Archeological enthusiasts. According to experts more fossils are lying in the still to be excavated parts of the park.

Khuri sand dunes

Khuri is a natural rural community in Thar Desert close to Jaisalmer and is renowned for the sand dunes shown in Fig. 3.4. The vast stretch of sandbanks in this village makes it a hot attraction of the tourists. The sand dunes in the village offers the majestic views of eye pleasing sunrise and sunset in the vast expanse of the horizon. The ripples created by the flying sands in the winds are really wonderful views. It is considered as one of the less explored hamlets in Thar Desert.

Khuri is situated 40 km away from outskirts of Jaisalmer, in the south-west direction of the Jaisalmer city. Here tourists reach by taking camel safari or any powerful SUV. Camel safari, Mud houses and Desert solitude are the main attractions of Khuri. The population of Khuri as per census 2001 is 1614 persons.

This is an ideal location for Camel safari. The Camel safari in Khuri is an adventurous experience for the travelers for a lifelong remembrance. Khuri sand dunes are one of most visited place by tourists. Khuri is an alternative to tourists for Sam sand dunes. It is a peaceful place with houses of mud and straw decorated like the patterns of Persian carpets.

The Khuri sand dune offers a memorable experience in the land of the Rajputs. Tourists enjoy the ride on camel back and which take them to a thrilling heights. Get closer to the local way of living with a close view of thatched straw roofs, camels, narrow streets and the local bazaar. At the night, campfires are organized with the tourists and listen to the songs of 'Kalbeliyas'. One can also try Rajasthani cuisine for a change and just keep looking on sand dunes as it changes its hue during different parts of day and say goodbye to the sun as it sets behind the crimson red sand dunes.

Lodrava Jaisalmer

Further beyond Amar Sagar, 15 km northwest of Jaisalmer, are situated the deserted ruins of Lodrava shown in Fig. 3.5 and Photo plate 3.4, which was the ancient capital before the move to Jaisalmer. It was probably founded by the Lodhra Rajputs, and passed to the ruler of Devagarh, Bhatti Devaraja, in 10th century. In 1025, Mahmud of Ghazni laid siege to the town, and it was sacked various times over subsequent decades, prompting Jaisala to shift the capital to a new location, resulting in the foundation of Jaisalmer in 1156. The population of Lodrava as per census 2001 is 292 persons.

The Jain Temples, rebuilt in the late 1970s, are the only reminders of the city's former magnificence. The main temple enshrines an image of Parasnath, the 23rd tirthankar, and is finely wrought in silver and surrounded by fine sculptures. The most attention-grabbing experience in the Lodurva is the peacock dance. Peacocks are a great pull and they are in plenty here. Lodurva is also known for its Jain temples. The temples are made of bright yellow sandstones.

There's not much to see in Lodurva except for a couple of temples in which the Parshvanath Temple is the most notable. The Parshvanath Temple is the main Jain temple which predates the temples of Jaisalmer just as the town itself is more ancient. The temple was destroyed in 1152, but was reconstructed in 1615 by Seth Tharu Shah and further additions were commissioned in

1675 and 1687. Its Torana Dwar or main archway is probably the most ornate of its kind in Rajasthan and interestingly, the sentry outside is a Rajput and not a Jain. The inner sanctum of the temple contains an image of the prophet Parshvanath (the 23rd Jain Tirthankar) in black stone with a multi-hooded serpent canopy. The whole complex was renovated in the 1970's and the temples are gleamingly clean and fresh which really shows off their beautiful golden sandstone carvings.

Temple walls decorated with the pictures of Lord Parsvanath, the 23rd Jain Tirthankar. The beautiful Jaali works make these temples a piece of marvel. The splendid and dominating arch in the main temple building is very attractive. These arches are typical of the Dilwara style of temple architecture. Also Moomal-ki-Meri, a ruined castle of the beauty princess Moomal, is still there to whisper the immortal love legends of Moomal-mahendra.

Sam sand dunes

Sam is situated in the outskirts of Jaisalmer, 42 K.M. from the main town shown in Fig. 3.6. One can reach here by Jeep or any other 4 wheel drive SUV or Camel back. Sam is famous for Sand, sands and only sands. The population of Sam as per census 2001 is 1266 persons.

Undoubtedly the most well known destination in Jaisalmer after the 'golden fort' is the Sam Sand dunes. Sam is one of hot tourist spot in the Jaisalmer. Sam area is 3 km long, 1 km wide and as much as half a kilometer high, the dunes are as treacherous as they are scenic. If one opt for a camel ride stay very close to raika (guide) as only he can manoeuvre through the quicksand, which has sucked many an unwary goat to its gruesome death. There is no vegetation here and the swirling winds are almost as intense as the khamsins (sandstorms) in the Sahara.

Sam sand dunes are becoming the major attraction in Jaisalmer. This is the closest place from where one can closely see Great Thar Desert. Sam has a truly magnificent stretch of sweeping dunes, with sparse or no vegetation. The best way to get here, of course, is on camelback.

The Sam dunes are also the most picturesque spot around Jaisalmer, and perhaps the whole of western Rajasthan. Sitting there in the evening with the sun setting, listening to the ballads of the legendary lovers Moomal and Mahendra on the jew's harp or the narh (a traditional musical instrument), give the feeling that time has come to a grinding halt.

The silken smooth sands of Sam look like a tale out of the Merchant of Venice and camel safaris are much in vogue here. An overnight trip to the area is a must if one really wants to enjoy all the sights and sounds, the ruins and the temples. Sleeping out in the open, stretched out on the sands while facing the twinkling sky is an out of the world experience. Many a tourist has fallen in love with the haunting beauty of the dunes – there is a definite aura of romance about it.

The Sam Dunes really come alive during the desert festival with a sound and light show, and gala spectacles of dance and music which will reverberate in ears long after someone have heard it.

Join a camel caravan at Jaisalmer on your Rajasthan tours and ride along the breathtaking crests and troughs. Enjoy the romance of solitude as your camel takes you deep in the hearts of the Thar Desert. Put yourself in the camp and experience the sun setting behind the horizon. Organize a bonfire with the fellow tourists in the night and enjoy the rustic and earthy music and dance of Rajasthan.

In the month of February/March, this whole place turns into a cultural hub. The desert festival organized amid these dunes is the showcase of Rajasthani culture as a whole. Open-air cultural extravaganzas, puppet shows, folk dance performances, camel races, competitions and general festivities mark this annual event that is held with great pomp and show at the Sam Sand dunes in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

CONCLUSIONS

Desert tourist circuit of Jaisalmer is constituted by five main tourist sites viz., Jaisalmer, Akal, Khuri, Lodrava and Sam. The fort is another attraction to be placed in secular group. Jaisalmer is famous for beautifully carved dwelling houses locally called haveli, Patua's havelis, Nathmal's haveli and Salim Singh's haveli may be named a few. Other than fort and havelies, temples of historic time are also beautifully carved and reflects well developed architecture of that time. Both, Hindus and Jains have contributed in the field of temple architecture. The developmental activities continued in later period and some temples ranging in date from 17th to 19th century.

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