



Analyzing The Problems And Prospects Of Tourism: A Review Of Sonbhadra District

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Abstract

Sonbhadra district, often referred to as the “Energy Capital of India” is not only rich in natural resources but also emerging as an important center of tourism in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Nestled between the Vindhyan and Kaimur ranges, the region is endowed with diverse landscapes, ancient monuments, waterfalls, rivers, caves, and tribal culture that collectively create immense potential for tourism development.

Tourism in Sonbhadra is wide variety. Historical forts such as Agori Fort and Vijaygarh Fort highlight the district’s medieval legacy, while cave paintings in the Son Valley and rock shelters of the Rajdari-Lakhauri region reflect prehistoric human settlements. Religious and spiritual tourism is significant, with sites like Shivdwar, Renukeshwar Mahadev, and temples near Renukoot attracting pilgrims throughout the year. Natural attractions including waterfalls such as Mukkha, Rajdari, Devdari, and Lakhaniya Dari draw eco-tourists and adventure seekers. The presence of Salkhan Fossil Park, with fossils dating back 1.4 billion years, adds a unique scientific and educational dimension to tourism in the district.

Overall, tourism in Sonbhadra presents a blend of history, nature, culture, and spirituality. With proper planning, investment, and community participation, the district can emerge as a major destination in Uttar Pradesh, contributing to regional development and cultural preservation.

Keywords: Tourism, Rock Paintings, Salkhan Fossil Park , Waterfalls, Forts, Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most significant human activities in the modern world, encompassing travel for leisure, recreation, pilgrimage, education, business, and cultural exchange. It involves the temporary movement of people away from their usual place of residence to destinations that offer unique natural beauty, historical monuments, cultural traditions, or other attractions. According to UNWTO: "Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.

Tourism is often considered a multifaceted industry as it combines transport, accommodation, food services, entertainment, and cultural experiences. It has become a major driver of economic development, contributing significantly to GDP, employment generation, and foreign exchange earnings in many countries, including India. Beyond its economic importance, tourism fosters cultural interaction, promotes global understanding, and strengthens peace by connecting people from different backgrounds.

In addition, Sonbhadra's tribal culture, folk traditions, and festivals provide opportunities for cultural tourism, offering visitors a glimpse into the region's intangible heritage. However, despite its vast potential, the tourism sector faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of promotion, and limited accessibility in remote areas. Sustainable tourism practices and government initiatives can transform Sonbhadra into a vibrant tourism hub by balancing ecological conservation with economic benefits for local communities.

Sensible tourism to natural areas, that protects the environment and develops the wellbeing of local people defined as ecotourism(Das, 2011). Moreover, ecotourism also caught the attention of diverse benefits, both as profitable leisure activity, and as a means of protection and improvement of the natural environment (Das, 2011).

In Uttar Pradesh there are many tourist came which includes both domestic and foreign. In 2023 domestic tourists are 478,526,000 and foreign tourists are 1,602,000.

Objectives

- I. To know the existing problems associated with the tourism in Sonbhadra
- II. Prescribe some suggestions for reforms and improvements of the tourism in Sonbhadra

Methodology

The study is based on the information from secondary data sources. The secondary data were collected from published books, different published research works, newspaper, magazines, reports of various government and non-government authorities, websites, and official statistical documents. Data recorded by all concerned authorities. All the data obtained from secondary sources are considered for draw a conclusion. Furthermore, some suggestions are prescribed for the betterment of tourism in Sonbhadra.

Research Area

Sonbhadra is the second largest district by area of Uttar Pradesh after Lakhimpur Kheri. It is only district in India which borders four states, namely – Madhya Pradesh to west, Chhattishgarh to the south, Jharkhand to south-east and Bihar to north-east. Sonbhadra district headquarter Robertsganj is situated on 24.685 degree north and 83.0684 degree east. The district has an area of 6788 square km. There are many rivers like Son, Began, Karmanasha, Rihand, Kanhar and Mesolithic and Paleolithic ages rock painting evidence present. Sonbhadra includes many tourist attractions. Sonbhadra connected with rest of India by air, train and roadways. It's population is 1862559 where male are 971344 and female are 891215 and sex ratio is 927. Literacy rate of Sonbhadra is 64% and 83.9% of the population spoke Hindi and 14.6% Bhojpuri and others. The district includes Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain and others. 16.88% of the population lives in urban region and much numbers are tribes namely- Agariya, Baiga, Gond, Dhuri, Kharwar, Pankha, Parahiya, etc.

Major Tourism Destination of Sonbhadra		
Historical places	Natural places	Temples
Vijaygarh fort	Salkhan fossil park	Shivdwar
Agori fort	Mukkha water fall	Maa Vaishnav Shaktipeeth dalla
Veer Loric Patthar	Kaimoor wildlife sanctuary	Renukeshwar Mahadeva temple
Rock paintings evidence in Son Valley.	Son view point (Robertsganj)	Jwaladevi temple
	Rihand dam	Vandevi temple.
	Dhanraul dam	Shivdwar

Major Tourism Destination of Sonbhadra

Vijaygarh Fort, located near Renukoot in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, is an ancient hill fort renowned for its historical, architectural, and cultural significance. Believed to have been built in the 5th century by the Kol kings, it later came under the control of various rulers, including the Chero dynasty and Raja Chait Singh of Banaras. The fort is perched on the Kaimur Hills, offering panoramic views of the surrounding forests and valleys. Its massive stone walls, intricate carvings, ancient temples, and rock inscriptions reflect the craftsmanship of past eras. The fort also houses stepwells and reservoirs, which once served as vital water sources. Local legends associate the site with romantic folklore, particularly the love story of Princess Chanderi and Prince Vijay, adding a layer of mystique.

Agori Fort, located near Chopan in the Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh, a historic monument surrounded by legend and mystery. Built on a hill where the Son and Rihand rivers meet, it served as the stronghold of the Agori Barhar rulers for centuries. Its elevated position, combined with dense forests and rugged landscapes, made it a naturally fortified site. Within its premises, one can still see remnants of stone walls, gateways, watchtowers, and ancient temples, showcasing the medieval architectural heritage of the region. Folklore associates the fort with tales of courage, spiritual rituals, and tantric traditions, enhancing its enigmatic charm. Though time has left parts of it in ruins, the fort's vantage point offers stunning views of surrounding valleys and waterways. Today, Agori Fort stands as both a historical treasure and a scenic attraction, drawing visitors, adventurers, and history lovers eager to experience its unique blend of nature and heritage.

Veer Lorik Patthar, located near Robertsganj in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, is a historic and cultural landmark associated with the legendary warrior Veer Lorik. According to folklore, Lorik, a cowherd-hero, displayed his unmatched strength by splitting a massive rock into two with his sword to defend his honor. The site, set amidst the scenic Vindhyan hills, holds great significance for the Ahir community and is celebrated for its tales of bravery and love. Even today, the split rock stands as a testament to this local legend, attracting tourists, folklore enthusiasts, and devotees who come to witness this symbol of valor.

The Son Valley, particularly in the Vindhyan–Kaimur belt of Mirzapur and Sonbhadra districts, preserves an important assemblage of **prehistoric rock paintings** that provide invaluable insights into the cultural history of the region. These paintings occur mainly on sandstone cliffs and rock shelters along the Son, Belan, Kanhar, and Karmanasha rivers, with notable sites at Lekhania, Panchmukhi, Basawan Ghatia, Murali Pahari, Kohbarwa Ghat, Hirana, Baghmanawa, and Mahuwaria. The shelters depict a rich variety of themes, including hunting scenes, animal figures such as deer, elephant, peacock, and cattle, ritual dances, battle processions, riders, handprints, and abstract geometric motifs. The pigments are predominantly red ochre derived from hematite, with occasional white (kaolin) and black (manganese or charcoal) used for contrast. Many panels display superimposition, indicating continuous or repeated use over centuries. Stylistic and archaeological associations suggest a chronological span from the Mesolithic period, through the Chalcolithic, and into historic and even medieval times. These rock art sites often occur in proximity to lithic scatters of Palaeolithic and Microlithic industries, linking them to long-term human occupation of the valley. Collectively, the Son Valley paintings reflect subsistence practices, social rituals, and movement patterns along this important Holocene cultural corridor in north-central India.

Salkhan Fossil Park, located near Salkhan village about 12 km from Robertsganj in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, spans nearly 25 hectares within the Kaimur Range and lies adjacent to the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary. It is globally significant for its well-preserved stromatolites—layered sedimentary structures formed by ancient cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) around 1.4 billion years ago—offering a rare glimpse into Precambrian life. Fossils at the site were first identified by geologists in the 1930s, with contributions from J.B. Auden, Mathur, Professor S. Kumar, and Mukund Sharma, among others. Officially inaugurated as a fossil park on 8 August 2002, it has since gained international attention, with Canadian geologist H.J. Hoffman praising the clarity of its fossils. In June 2025, the park was added to UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites, marking a major step toward full inscription by 2026–27. Notably, the stromatolites here are far older than those in Yellowstone National Park, underscoring the site's exceptional scientific value.

Mukha Falls, also known as Mukkha Waterfall, is a scenic plunge-type waterfall located in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, about 55 km west of Robertsganj and 15 km from Ghorawal, along the Robertsganj–Ghorawal road. Formed on the Belan River, it cascades down rocky terrain, offering a spectacular view, especially during the monsoon season when water flow is at its peak. The area around the falls is serene and relatively less crowded, making it an offbeat destination for nature lovers. Nearby attractions include a Devi Temple and Karia Tal, a picturesque lake formed on the river. Access is free, but the approach road is unpaved, requiring caution. Best visited during or just after the rains, Mukha Falls is also part of local tourism initiatives aimed at promoting the natural heritage of Sonbhadra along with nearby sites like Salkhan Fossil Park.

Kaimoor Wildlife Sanctuary, located in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, covers about 500 sq km in the Kaimur Range and was established in 1982. It is a biodiversity-rich area featuring dry deciduous forests, grasslands, and seasonal waterfalls. Wildlife includes leopards, sambhar, wild boar, sloth bears, chinkara, and many bird species. The sanctuary is also notable for ancient rock paintings and archaeological sites, reflecting the region's cultural history. Its varied landscapes and ecological significance make it a key conservation area in the Vindhyan region. Kaimoor is an emerging tourism destination, offering opportunities for wildlife observation, nature trails, and cultural exploration.

Son View Point, located near Robertsganj in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, offers a fantastic view of the Son River meandering through the Vindhyan hills. This scenic spot is especially captivating during sunrise and sunset, when the river glistens and the surrounding forests glow with golden light. The viewpoint is accessible by road and serves as a peaceful escape for nature lovers and photographers. Its elevation provides a clear vista of the valley, seasonal waterfalls, and lush greenery during the monsoon. Son View Point is part of Sonbhadra's tourism attractions, often visited along with nearby sites like Mukha Falls and Salkhan Fossil Park.

Rihand Dam, popularly known as Govind Ballabh Pant Sagar, stands in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, on the Rihand River, which flows into the Son River. Built in 1962, this concrete gravity structure was designed to provide irrigation facilities and generate hydroelectric power. It forms Govind Ballabh Pant Sagar Lake, the country's largest artificial reservoir, with a storage capacity of around 8.6 million acre-feet. The surrounding belt hosts numerous thermal power stations, making it a significant energy-producing area. The lake supports fisheries and attracts migratory birds during winter, adding ecological and tourism value, while contributing substantially to Sonbhadra's economy and regional development.

Dhanraul Dam, also known as Dhandhraul Dam, is located near Robertsganj in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh. Built across the Ghaghar River, the dam plays a crucial role in providing irrigation facilities to the surrounding agricultural lands. Its reservoir supplies water for farming, especially in the fertile plains of the district, supporting crops like paddy and wheat. The dam also serves as a local water source and contributes to groundwater recharge. Surrounded by natural scenery, it has become a spot for local tourism and recreation. Dhanraul Dam is significant for Sonbhadra's rural economy, ensuring water security and agricultural productivity throughout the year.

Shivdwar, located about 10 km from Ghorawal in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, is a prominent ancient Shiva temple and pilgrimage site. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, it is believed to date back to the Gupta period, reflecting early Indian temple architecture. The temple houses a sacred Shivling, attracting devotees, especially during the holy month of Shravan and on Maha Shivratri. Surrounded by scenic hills and greenery, Shivdwar offers a tranquil spiritual atmosphere. The site also holds cultural and historical significance, with local legends linking it to ancient mythological tales. It remains an important center of faith and heritage in the Vindhyan region.

Maa Vaishnav Shaktipeeth, located in Dalla, Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, is a revered Hindu pilgrimage site dedicated to Goddess Vaishnavi. Known for its divine ambiance and religious significance, it attracts devotees year-round, especially during Navratri. The temple is surrounded by the natural beauty of the Vindhyan hills, enhancing its spiritual charm.

Renukeshwar Mahadeva Temple in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, is a revered pilgrimage site dedicated to Lord Shiva. Nestled within the scenic Vindhyan hills, it houses an ancient Shivling that is central to the temple's spiritual significance. Rich in mythology, the site is linked to sacred tales from Hindu traditions, enhancing its divine charm. The temple witnesses grand celebrations during Shravan, Maha Shivratri and other holy days, drawing devotees from far and wide. Pilgrims are captivated by the serene surroundings, the melodic echo of mantras, and the atmosphere of devotion that envelops the temple.

Jwaladevi Temple, situated in Sonbhadra district, is a prominent temple dedicated to Goddess Jwala. Known for its sacred flame symbolizing divine power, the temple holds immense religious significance for devotees. Surrounded by picturesque landscapes, it attracts worshippers seeking blessings, especially during Navratri, when grand festivities and rituals are performed. The temple's spiritual ambiance, enhanced by devotional hymns and the serene environment, offers a deeply peaceful experience. Rich in local legends and cultural heritage, Jwaladevi Temple is not only a center of faith but also a reflection of Sonbhadra's traditional devotion and vibrant festivities, making it a cherished spiritual destination.

Vandevi Temple, located near the Rihand Dam in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh, is a revered religious site dedicated to Goddess Vandevi, believed to be the protector of forests and wildlife. Surrounded by lush greenery, the temple holds special significance for locals, travelers, and dam workers, who often seek blessings for safety and prosperity. Its peaceful setting and natural beauty make it both a spiritual and scenic spot. During festivals, especially Navratri, the temple becomes vibrant with rituals, devotional songs, and large gatherings of devotees. Blending faith with nature, Vandevi Temple stands as a unique cultural and spiritual landmark of the region.

Problems of Tourism in Sonbhadra

Sonbhadra is underdeveloped area in tourism , there are many problems of tourism development like –

- I. Improper or underdeveloped infrastructure facilities. Food outlets without proper hygiene and bad quality restaurants at locations.
- II. Lack of community participation in planning. Insufficient avenue, connectivity via air and rail to numerous traveler locations
- III. Lack of awareness among tourists.
- IV. Lack of trained guides and less participation of local people for tourism management.
- V. Seasonal factor in tourism like Sonbhadra, Mukkha water fall is more beautiful and become tourism attraction in rainy season.
- VI. Security is the main reason which increase or decrease the tourism possibilities in Sonbhadra .
- VII. Preference to money in tourism causes negative impact on environment.
- VIII. Attitude of government and local people are not to much positive. Lack of tourist reception centers and poor health care facilities.
- IX. Weak public-private partnership and less participation of NGOs. Poor advertisement and publicity of tourism.
- X. Illegal wildlife trade.
- XI. Improper and untidy public toilets at tourist locations.
- XII. Improper maintenance of tourist sites basically in religious destinations

Prospects of Tourism in Sonbhadra

Sonbhadra's prospects lie in developing it as a multi-dimensional tourism hub—a destination that combines eco-tourism, heritage, spirituality, and scientific exploration. Improved connectivity, tourist amenities, and promotional campaigns can transform it from an underrated region to a major attraction in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, tourism development can generate employment, promote tribal culture, and support balanced regional growth.

1. Tourism generate empowerment of local communities and create employment and reduce poverty.
2. Raises the living standard of local people and tribes.
3. Financial benefits .
4. Increase the social, economical and cultural aspect of local people, tourists and management.
5. Solution of human wildlife conflicts.
6. Developing environmental awareness and conservation of nature and reforestation.

Suggestions

Improve road and rail connectivity to major tourist spots. Establish tourist information centers, rest houses, way-side amenities, and eco-friendly accommodation facilities. Introduce better signage, lighting, and safety measures at remote sites.

Launch targeted campaigns branding Sonbhadra as the “*Heritage and Nature Hub of Eastern Uttar Pradesh*.” Develop tourism circuits. Organize cultural festivals showcasing tribal dances, music, and crafts to attract domestic and foreign visitors.

Promote eco-tourism activities such as trekking, bird-watching, river cruises, and camping in forest areas. Ensure strict environmental regulations to prevent degradation of waterfalls, forests, and wildlife sanctuaries. Encourage community-based eco-tourism where local tribes can serve as guides and cultural ambassadors.

Develop Salkhan Fossil Park as an international geo-tourism site with interpretation centers, research labs, and digital exhibits. Collaborate with universities and research institutions to organize field visits, conferences, and fossil study programs. Promote school and college tours to foster educational tourism.

Train local youth in hospitality, guiding, and cultural performances. Promote homestay programs in tribal villages to provide authentic cultural experiences. Support local artisans by establishing craft markets near tourist hubs. Create mobile apps and websites with detailed tourist maps, virtual tours, and booking facilities. Social media platforms can be used to highlight Sonbhadra’s hidden gems. Introduce e-ticketing for entry into parks, forts, and sanctuaries.

Encourage public-private partnerships (PPPs) for hotel chains, adventure parks, and transport services. Provide subsidies and incentives for eco-friendly tourism projects. Regularly monitor and evaluate tourism policies to ensure sustainable growth.

Conclusion

Tourism in Sonbhadra district offers a promising pathway for sustainable regional growth, combining natural charm, cultural heritage, and scientific significance. The region’s diverse attractions create opportunities for multiple forms of tourism, including eco-tourism, heritage tourism, pilgrimage, and educational tourism. Unlike conventional destinations, Sonbhadra stands out for its unique blend of industrial identity and untapped tourism potential, which, if harnessed effectively, could transform the district into a model of balanced development.

The prospects are bright, but they require a systematic approach. Equally important is the role of community participation—empowering tribal communities through homestays, craft promotion, and cultural performances can ensure that tourism benefits are shared at the grassroots level. By linking Sonbhadra with established circuits like Varanasi and Mirzapur, the district can attract a wider flow of both domestic and international tourists.

Government initiatives like *Swadesh Darshan 2.0* provide additional momentum by emphasizing heritage conservation, livelihood creation, and eco-friendly practices. If combined with private investment and innovative promotional strategies, these measures can position Sonbhadra as an emerging hub on India’s tourism map.

It is a hidden gem with the potential to be recognized globally for its fossils, landscapes, and living culture. With careful planning and sustainable practices, tourism here can serve as a catalyst for economic progress, cultural revival, and environmental conservation. Thus, the future of tourism in Sonbhadra lies in striking a balance between development and preservation, ensuring that its treasures are enjoyed responsibly by generations to come.

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