

Exploring Potential of a Tribal Region: The Case of the Dang District, Gujarat, India

Piyush Thakur, Tarisha Desai

Abstract - *In the 21st century, tourism is becoming one of the fastest-growing economic sectors. Tourism is a “large and complex human activity that requires a wide range of services, infrastructure and inputs”. Over the past half-century, tourism has opened up many opportunities around the world. Tourism is an economic engine that brings many sources of income to the country, but it also has many potential challenges, complications and potential negative impacts on the environment, culture and community.*

Key Words: *Eco-Tourism, NTFP, Tribes, Craft, Rural-Tourism*

Introduction:

The southern region of Gujarat state is expecting rapid development in horticulture, agriculture, hydropower development, tourism and highway construction. This study consists of exploring the role of tourism development in the Dang region with an understanding of tourism's economic, cultural, environmental and social impacts and provides guidance on models of tourism development for the sustainable development of the Dang region.

The Dang district, in the comfortable and quiet valleys in the Sahyadri hills of the Western Ghats in the state of Gujarat, holds great diversity potential for a heritage site, rare and natural cultural and heritage. The enchanting forests and waterfalls, the beautiful sunrise and sunset, and the mild climate highlight the beauty of the region, where there are many types of tourism such as cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism, adventure tourism, ecotourism and wildlife tourism.

The mountain range has the potential to attract a large number of domestic and foreign tourists. The Gujarat State Government promotes tourism exclusively as an economic development tool for the Dang region through a variety of initiatives, policies and concessions.

Research Questions:

1. What is the relationship between host communities and natural resources in the Dang district?
2. What strategies could be used to strengthen the tourism-environment-community relationships in the Dang district?

Aim:

To explore the tourism potential and develop effective strategies to uplift the development of the tribal region of The Dang district.

Study Purpose:

The central purpose of this study is to assess the current status of ecotourism at a destination(s) where it is being promoted as a regional development strategy, through an evaluation of the existing tourism environment-community relationships and impacts.

About Study Area:

South Gujarat, also known as Dakshin Gujarat is a region in the Indian state of Gujarat. The region has a humid climate than other regions of Gujarat. The western part is almost coastal and is known as Kantha Vistar ("coastal expanse"), and the eastern part is also known as Dungar Vistar ("hilly expanse"), which ranges from 100 to 1000 metres, with the highest peak at Saputara in the Dang district. The administrative headquarter of the district is Ahwa town. Dang has an area of 1,764 km² and a population of 228,291 (as of 2011). As of 2011, it is the least populous district of Gujarat (out of 33). As per the Planning Commission, Dang is one of the most economically distressed districts out of 640 districts in India. 95% of the population belongs to one of the scheduled tribes. The five Kings of Dangs are the only hereditary royals in India whose titles are currently recognized by the government owing to an agreement made during the British Raj in

1842. The Dang is connected with Navsari, Tapi, Nasik, Dhule and Nandurbar districts. The nearest railway station is Unai, though only narrow-gauge trains pass through the station. The nearest railway station for broad-gauge trains is Bilimora Jn.

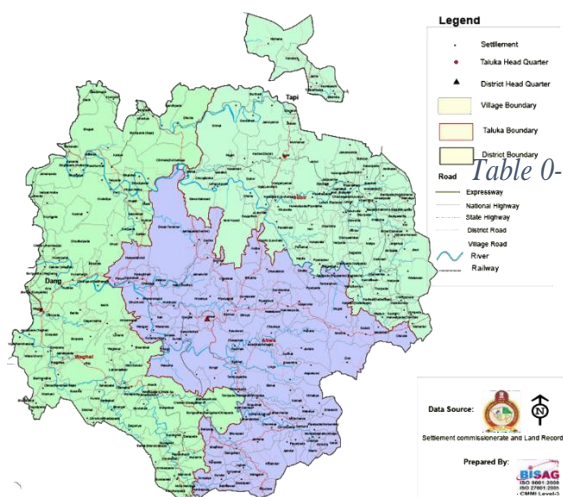


Figure 1 District Map source: (Bisag-N, n.d.)

Dang district's tourism development potential

Dang district has tourism potential such as rich forests, 20 large and small waterfalls, 6 pilgrimage sites, 3 heritage sites, 2 hill stations and beautiful & peaceful landscapes with mountainous terrain. The only resort in the mountains of Gujarat, more than 6 eco-tourism camping sites, resorts on the Sahyadri hill plateau, Vansda national park, Waghai botanical garden, museums and archaeological assets enrich the cultural background of the tribal people.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the Dang district is a lagging area in terms of both demographics and socio-economics. However, the region has a lot of potential for the development of the tourism industry through appropriate strategic proposals and an implementation framework. This section covers the key development strategies of the tourism industry.

- Basket of different sizes
- Moshti¹
- Karandlas²

¹ Moshti is a grain storage container made out of bamboo. The base is usually round and has a wide opening at the top. The height varies.

- Pachhorana³
- Wild honey
- Nagli papad
- Nagli floor
- Nagli biscuit
- Adad bhujiyu
- Bamboo pickle
- Chokha ni papdi

Land Use

Table 0-1 Land Use in the Dang district (m.sq.) Source: (Gujarat, n.d.)

Total Geographical Area	1,72,356
Forest Area	1,01,329
Cultivable Land	57,843
Agricultural Land	53,949
Uncultivable Land	3,894
Total Area Under Irrigation	7,500
Permanent Pasture and Other Grazing Land	262
Wasteland	1,524

Economy in Dang

Nearly 85% of the population depends on agricultural livelihoods and farmers or their employees who are agricultural workers. Bamboo and milk production are other economic activities in the district.

Occupation activities of the communities in the "Dang" district:

Agriculture

98% of the rural population is involved and dependent on agriculture as the primary source of livelihood. The majority of the workforce in the agriculture sector are cultivators and agricultural labourers. This represents tremendous pressure and dependence on the agriculture sector.

About 64.8% of the total land of the district is only available for farming which is also situated on a hilly slope's uneven topography. Out of this 64.5% of agricultural land, only 15.6% of land has

² Basket made of bamboo for Chikoo fruits.

³ People use chaaj or winnowing fan for winnowing purpose.

irrigation facilities and in the rest of the area, agricultural activities are rain-fed.

Therefore, the majority of the crop pattern of the dang district depends on rain as a lack of irrigation facilities. So, monsoon is only a season for farmers for cultivating land and farmers are restricted to take a single crop during the whole year. The cropping pattern includes rice, ragi, kharsani, tuver, groundnut, mangoes and custard apples are the main agricultural products of Dang. Ragi is the main crop in Dang.

Forests-based economic activities

59 % of the land of the district is forestland, which falls under the reserve forest and Protected Forest. Out of the total area under forest cover, 22% area is under Reserve Forest and the remaining proportion of land falls under protected forest area. Particularly for a few parts of protected forest areas, forest dwellers are given rights to do the cultivation. These forest dwellers are mostly dependent on forest cultivation activities.

In this context, this forest comprises a wide range of flora and fauna which is very distinctive and is an important and integral part of ecology. Forests in this region have various medicinal plants such as Avartani⁴ and Baheda⁵. Additionally, the Dang Forest is also richest in terms of species producing high-quality teak wood along with Bamboo trees and many other timber species.

There is an ample variety of forest produces encompassing timber, charcoal, honey, Gum, Firewood, industrial wood, fruits, herbs and medicinal plants on the other side, local communities are also dependent on forest-based activities such as collection, sale of (NTFP) non-timber forest produce as mentioned above, forest cultivation, grazing for livestock and other forest management-based activities monitored by the forest department of GoG. Therefore, the forest, as a natural resource, plays a significant

role in the income generation of the local community. Concisely, there is a need to establish a support economy based on the concept of eco-tourism to obtain future socio-economic sustainability.

Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry and Dairy production are other economic activities of the dang district. Animal husbandry also opens up the boundaries for agro-processing units in the Dang districts.

Plantation and Nursery

Sustainable livelihood provides development of scope of plantation and nursery.

Current scenario of tourists in the Dang district

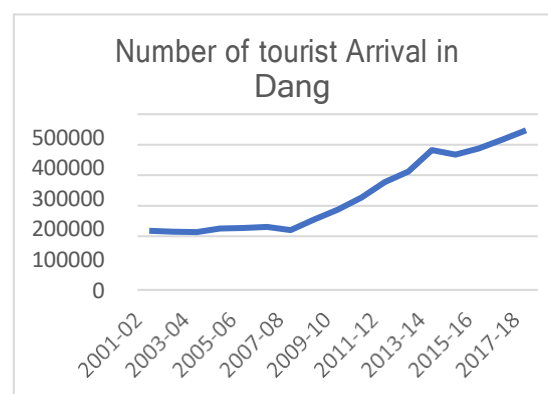


Figure 1: Tourist Arrival in Dang District source: (Gujarat Tourism, n.d.)

Statics of listed data show tourist flow is the constant increase in last decade, promotion of eco-tourism by Gujarat government shows real-time effects on tourism development of the dang district.

Saputara is one of the important leisure destinations as the only Hill station in Gujarat. Apart from leisure purposes, many tourists visit this place for wellness, adventure, forest areas and other natural attractions such as waterfalls. Saputara has only a 1.3% share of tourists from the total tourist flow in Gujarat in 2013-14. Additionally, tourists at Saputara as a

⁴ (Helicteres isora Linn.) is a medicinal plant which is used in several diseases. It is commonly known as Marodphali, Marorphali, Enthani etc. it is used as a folk medicine to treat snake bite, diarrhoea and constipation of new born baby.

⁵ It is one of the main constituents of "Triphala" which is used for the management of common cold, pharyngitis and constipation. All parts of the tree are used for medicinal purposes, especially the dried fruit.

leisure destination have increased with a 27.9 % growth rate from 2012-13 to 2013-14.

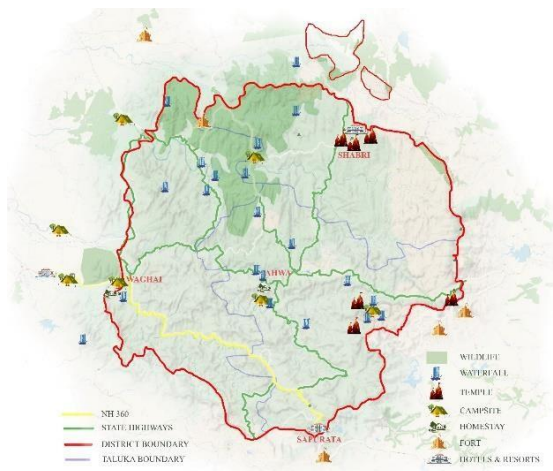


Figure 3 Tourist Destinations of Dang District
(source: Author)

Host Community and Tourists

Through the survey of tourists and host community, strongly enhancement of realization comes into the light that tourism can improve their economic status and has the potential capacity to boost revenue earning capacity through local hand-crafted products. Thus, tourism gives an employment opportunity that is directly connected with their educational background.

Tourism in this area surely improves the local economy and initiated reserves impact on agriculture outcome as local people less focus on agriculture and providing more focus on tourism by considering tourism as the growth engine of the economy.

Survey has been conducted for 150 samples of tourists and interviews with the host community.

Data collection & analysis

A sample survey of tourists (150 samples) represents that:

- Approximately, 72% are of the 18 - 35 age group
- Around 17% 36-45 age group
- Remaining 11% are below 18 and above 45 age group
- 98% of tourists visit for pleasure/personal purpose

- Maximum tourists from nearby locations such as Surat, Navsari, Valsad, Nasik, Vadodara, etc.
- Basic mode of travelling is either owned car or rented car.
- There is a lack of public transport facilities.
- Tourists prefer to stay for 1-3 days.
- Tourists prefer to visit in various seasons such as winter, monsoon, autumn, and spring.
- Very less tourist prefers to visit dang in the summer season

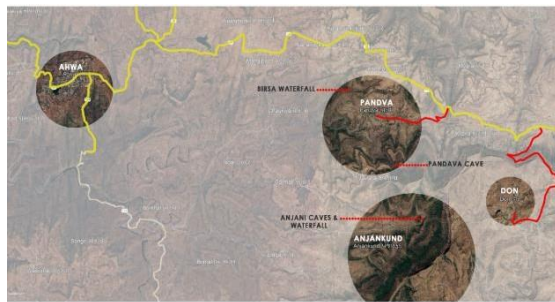
Proposal for tourist circuit

A tourist circuit is nothing more than a set of destination circuits starting from a route or near a major tourist destination within the confines of the same possible area within the same city or village. The nature of tourist attractions can be the same or different. It can have entry and exit points as well as a minimum to include three destinations.

In this case, Dang established a tourism circuit based on the concept of promoting ecotourism and cultural tourism with the proposal of an existing tourist destination and also with a new base destination. Mainly, combining different tourist attractions such as eco-tourism areas, waterfalls, cultural villages, gardens, parks, national parks, lakes, picnic areas, temples, tourist spots incense and botanical garden.

Sightseeing and Tourism in Dang District based on the theories mentioned above, local host communities' economic and social improvement through responsible tourism is described in four main sub-regions:

1. Ahwa tourist circuit



AHWA TOURIST CIRCUIT

Figure 4 Ahwa Tourist Circuit (source: Author)

The tourist attractions are:

- Brada Falls
- Birsa Waterfall
- Anjani Cave
- Anjani Waterfall
- Anjani Kund
- Pandav Cave
- Pandav Waterfall
- Don Hill

2. Waghai tourist circuit



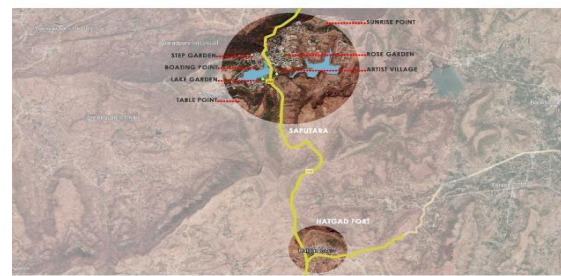
WAGHAI TOURIST CIRCUIT

Figure 5 Waghai tourist circuit (source: Author)

Attractions are:

- Gira Waterfall
- Waghai Botanical Garden
- Vansda National Park
- Forest Reserve
- Kilad Eco Campsite
- Ambapada Village (Rural Tourism)

3. Saputara tourist circuit



SAPUTARA TOURIST CIRCUIT

Figure 6 Saputara Tourist Circuit (source: Author)

Tourist attractions are:

- Sunset spot
- River view terrace garden
- Rose garden with a variety of roses
- Nageshwar Mahadev mandir
- Saputara Cultural and Ancient Museum
- Point Observation Saputara
- Lake Saputara extreme sport site
- Archaeological site
- Hatgadh Village Fort

4. Subir tourist circuit



SUBIR TOURIST CIRCUIT

Figure 7 Subir tourist circuit (source: Author)

Tourism circuit destinations are:

- Shabari Dham
- Girmal waterfall
- Purna wildlife sanctuary
- Pampa Sarovar
- Mahal Campsite

Strategies for exploring the potential of the Dang district

Tourism activities and promotions can provide alternative livelihoods for local

communities with minimal negative socioeconomic and environmental impacts on the host region, Dang District, where biodiversity and cultural assets can contribute to income generation for the local community.

This study concludes with strategic recommendations for enhancing tourism demand for that particular destination in the region and determining the destination's competitiveness that will help increase future tourism demand.

Financial arrangements should include the sharing of the financial interests of the tourism industry among stakeholders. This will help maintain stakeholder interest in engaging in these areas.

- Culture Tourism
- Women's Empowerment
- Regulations for tourist safety and security measures
- Value of forest-based products
- Forest Residency Programs
- Establishment of a Forest Research Institute (FRI)
- Potential for Adventure Tourism
- Marketing Tourism Model
- Provide international standard facilities to tourists in the Dang tribal areas
- Tribal collective farm projects, herb gardens, etc.
- Providing safeguard to Tribals and Tribal Development Program
- Promoting equity in rural/pro-poor tourism
- Long-term vision to implement strategy
- Secondary revenue generator
- Aspects of Waste Management
- Training and capacity building to promote CBT
- Promotion of volunteer tourism programs
- Promotion of volunteer tourism programs

Recommendations:

- Development of Eco-Tourism and Enhancement of Existing Bio-Diversity
- Host Community Involvement and Income Generation

- Development of eco-camp site at the don hill station
- Provisions under existing policies
- Development of Cultural Tourism
- Marketing and Promotion
- Sale Cum Demonstration Centres

Conclusion:

The hilly topography and large forest cover are the best opportunities to develop the tourism potential of the district. Due to the hilly and forest region of the Dang district, it has the scope of providing adventure tourism. Forest is a great source of forest based timber products such as timber, firewood, industrial wood, bamboos, charcoal etc. and non-timber-based products such as honey, gum, fruits, flowers, herbs and medicinal plants have the potential to increase occupational opportunities for the local community as well to increase economical sustainability. In Dang district apart from Saputara, Don is the hill station of the state which has major scope to develop as a pocket-friendly hill station of Gujarat with higher carrying tourist capacity. Tourism has the potential to upgrade the economic conditions of locals by promoting community and cultural base handicrafts and arts by providing livelihood opportunities for women and other artisans. The Dang has the potential to fulfil all aspects of the development of eco-tourism in the state and eco-tourism holds the possibility to create employment for the local host community.

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