

## **Augmenting Tourism and Hospitality Experience: A Study of Myths, Legends and Folk Tales of East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, India**

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#### **Abstract**

Folk tales, myths and legends are representative of the unique cultural aspects of an ethnic community that differentiates it from the other. Many countries of the world are projecting legends in the promotion of its famous attractions as the authorities are fully aware about the power of legendary tales in attracting tourists. The inclusion of legends as a description of tourist attractions, projects their indigenouslyness thereby promoting oriental and otherness themes. As such, this present piece of research underlines the role of myths, legends and folk tales in promoting cultural tourism. The researcher, through this study attempts to highlight the significance of myths, legends and folk tales in promoting cultural tourism. Tourism should be viewed through the lenses of the folk in order to enhance the visitor perception about the folk culture and to enhance the image of the destination.

Key words: myths, legends, folk tales, culture, tourism

#### **INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL HERITAGE VIS-A-VIS TOURISM: ITS ROLE AND IMPORTANCE**

Living heritage like arts and crafts, myths, legends and rituals having high risk of being forgotten by the younger generations may be revitalized by tourists who show interest in them. Moreover, the funds generated from tourism may help conserve heritage monuments (UNWTO, 2001). Folk-culture and its various expressions, namely myths, legends and folk tales are considered as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) or living heritage conceived from the three conceptual frameworks of folk, nation and tradition (UNESCO, 2008). The Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development (2009) stated that culture is increasingly becoming an important element of the tourism product, which also creates distinctiveness in a crowded global marketplace. Similar positive assessments can be found everywhere which are, usually based on UN World Tourism Organization estimates that cultural tourism accounts for 40% of international tourism (Richards, 2007)

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According to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, ICH is “the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2008). Related to people, community, popular classes or groups. Under the name of which the knowledge and the work of the people were scanned in order to identify hypothetical elements to include in strategies of integration of the global society. Related to rituals, culture, transmission.

OECD (2009) aims to develop a relationship between tourism and culture, to project culture as a source of identity and differentiation in the face of globalization and to analyze the relationship between tourism, culture and the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations. Tourism and culture are therefore an extremely potent economic engine. According to (Europa Nostra, 2005) “more than 50% of tourist activity in Europe is driven by cultural heritage and cultural tourism is expected to grow the most in the tourism sector.”

Thus, culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship that can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations, regions and countries. Heritage tourism was a very popular word of the 1990’s which was used to promote tourism to different destinations by packaging of an identity for sale (Palmer, 1999). As Smith (1991: 16) argues, heritage attractions are "sacred centres', objects of spiritual and historical pilgrimage, that reveal the uniqueness of their nation's 'moral geography".

Cultural identity communicates the past and the present tradition and history of a people enabling them to be identified as distinctive group (Palmer, 1999). Indigenous communities and traditions, such as ethnic groups and minority cultures are one of the typologies of cultural tourism product that can be developed and oral traditions and folklore play an important role (Smith, 2001). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2003) the various things that binds a group together are, tradition or a way of life and the country they originate from. These things come in various forms such as objects that can be held and buildings that can be explored, or songs that can be sung and stories that can be told. These things form part of a heritage, and this heritage requires active effort on our part in order to safeguard it.” According to Csapó (2012) folklore/folk culture is part of cultural heritage and heritage tourism. Traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors such as oral traditions which include myths, legends and folk tales are part of our cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), is made up of all immaterial manifestations of culture and represents the variety of living heritage of a human race as well as the most important vehicle of cultural diversity (Lenzerini, 2011).

The local people play a vital role in keeping their Intangible Cultural Heritage alive and passing it on to future generations. Moreover, since ICH constitute oral traditions and other immaterial culture, appropriate conservation and management is vital to prevent exhaustion/extinction (Peil, 2005). Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects but also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to future generations, such as performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge, oral traditions/folk

narrative such as myths, legends and folk tales and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

From the available literature, it can be deduced that cultural heritage has at least three different and intertwined meanings. The first meaning considers cultural heritage from the material objects perspective such as monuments, buildings, collection of objects. The second one considers cultural heritage from the arts perspective such as performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, songs, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. The third meaning considers cultural heritage from the inheritance perspective such as traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, oral traditions, stories (myths, legends and folk tales).

Heritage tourism according to Csapó(2012) is a form of tourism, which constitutes both natural and cultural attributes and is nature based. He further classified heritage tourism into natural and cultural heritage, material, non-material which includes folk culture and folklore such as myths, legends and folk tales. Heritage professionals dealing with tangible material culture find difficulty in managing ICH. Moreover, since ICH constitute oral traditions and other immaterial culture, appropriate conservation and management is vital to prevent exhaustion/extinction (Peil, 2005) and tourism can act as a driver for conservation.

## **ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLK TALES IN PROMOTING CULTURAL TOURISM: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

The desire to escape the mundane and high disposable income has given rise to a more experienced tourists (Fandos & Puyuelo, 2012), who desire to learn more about people's culture, to live like them and to find out about the real identity of the places they visit (Richards, 2009). Culture is considered a major source of differentiation and innovation (Zukin, 2004). Myths, legends and folk tales which is part of intangible cultural heritage has the power to enhance the destination image (Razak, 2012) differentiates it as a tourist destination and improves attractiveness (Pérez-Aranda, Guerreiro, & Mendes, 2015) prompting a sense of imagination and escapism, such as in the case of Robinhood festival (Everett & Parakootathil, 2016). Myths, legends and folk tales generates place narratives which impacts consumption experience (Pérez-Aranda, Guerreiro, & Mendes, 2015). As such, this present piece of research underlines the role of myths, legends and folk tales in promoting cultural tourism.

History and culture are interesting sources of myths and legends which can be used to differentiate it as a tourist destination. Myths and legends could be used as word clouds which could help communicate about the tourist destination (Aranda, Guerreiro & Mendes, 2015).

Myths, legends and folk tales are incorporated for tourism promotions as they have the power to enhance the appeal of tourist destinations. The inclusion of mythological aspects can contribute to the imagination of places as Oriental or otherness destinations, a reputable approach to attracting tourists (Razak, 2012). From the available literature it was found that some unusual and peculiar myths are being exploited to lure tourists and used in destination marketing to highlight the uniqueness of a particular ethnicity and a place's identity (Razak, 2012). The Robinhood festival which is a historical re-enactment of the legend in Nottinghamshire, UK play

a role in generating and promoting tourism. Such historical re-enactments similar to myths, legends and folk tales associated with a place creates a sense of freedom and escape, camaraderie and inter-personal social authenticity and the transformation of self and creation of alternative (additional) social identities (Everett & Parakootathil, 2016). Folk narratives like myths, legends and folk tales connected to a place can be effectively used in the development of themes and promotional campaigns (Yavuz, Sumbul, Ergecm & Derdiyok, I. C. 2016).

From an extensive review of literature, the researcher has learned that myths and legends are yet to carve a niche in the study of cultural tourism. Destinations like the Grimm Fairytale Route in Germany and the Dracula Legend in Transylvania in Romania have been successful in pulling multitudes by projecting the fairytales and legends as the main attraction of these places. Hence, this study is an attempt to project the myths, legends and folk tales of the ethnic group and how they are inextricably connected with certain tourist destinations, both popular and yet little known. The application of folk tales and local myths to promote tourism is eminent in Thailand's four central Isan provinces: Kalasin, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi Et. Infact folk narratives/tales were considered as an integral part of their cultural heritage since 2009 by the Department of Cultural Promotion at the Ministry of Culture. Interestingly, folk narratives and tales are retold to encourage cultural tourism. Thailand's policy initiative is to boost its culture as a tourist attraction that involves both nature and ancient remains. Studies reveal dominant features of reproduction and redefinition of folk narrative/tales of famous Sin Sai Tales into mural art to popularise "Sim" one of the popular attractions in Khon Kaen which became famous among Thai and foreign tourists (Wannakit, 2015). Stories of "Mahsuri" in Langkawi and "Cerita Tok Syekh" as well as "Batu Kapal" in Mount Jerai in Kedah are regarded by the local community as credible in terms of their existence and sacredness. Studies reveal that in order to promote such narratives digital technology was used. It was also reported that a tourist guide cum story teller in these two famous spots were deployed in order to facilitate tourists understanding of the legend, stories. Replicas in the form of Mahsuri's tomb and house in Langkawai and historical museum of Mount Jerai was constructed with the aim of informing the tourists about these stories which would otherwise be forgotten and this has attracted the attention of visitors . In the context of the oral story of Langkawi and Mount Jerai, there are evident reports of rituals being practiced at the sites.

The folk culture/narratives connected to a tourist attraction will highlight the characters, plot and story motives which are distinct thereby enhancing the knowledge and experiences of the tourists. The island of Bali, Indonesia and Langkawi in Malaysia are perfect example of how a country in Southeast Asia exploits sacred narratives and rituals for the purpose of cultural tourism. Bali has been successful at using its stories for the survival of tourism. There is a very close and meaningful link between sacred narratives and cultural tourism in Malaysia and should be encouraged for tourism purposes. Therefore, folk narratives can be used to promote tourism on a global scale and regain its lost luster.

The usage of myths such as Mt Kinabalu and Monsopiad as a promotional tool in tourism brochures in Malaysia show that Mt Kinabalu's myth has been incorporated in promotional brochures from 1969-2015 while the legend of Monsopiad has been incorporated in brochures

from 2007-2015. It is therefore evident that places connected with myths and legends has the power to attract tourists and packaged as a product (Razak & Romle, 2016). In South Western Transylvania the The Land of Hateg which has the richest heritage and natural diversity in Romania (Muntean, 2012) with an aim to develop tourism the SENS (Society for Nonformal and Social Education) proposed an integrated tourism promotion model based on Legends which is one element linking all the features of the region (Vesa and Muntean, 2013). “The Land of Hateg—Where Legends Live” became a reality after three years and went on to become a successful branding and tourism strategy. Even academically, this brand has been recognized best practice model in the scientific research magazine of the University of Bucharest (Vilsanescu, 2016). A very unique and creative approach have been adopted to safeguard and preserve the legends –the LegendaRoom-- meant to be an education centre, a cultural heritage preservation method and also a tourist attraction. It is more of an exhibition with legends similar to a museum comprising two components: 1) Visual component- legendary characters, legendary context (outfit, position, posture, objects, visual framework) and 2) the emotional component- stories about legends. Legenda Room can be considered as a real museum of legends (SENS, 2015).

The importance of myths and legends is very much evident in Malaysia and legends have been used as promotional campaign for many years now, for e.g Langkawi island is promoted as “Isle of Legends” (Ahmad, 2008). Stories based on legends have inspired people to travel to far off destinations (Laing and Crouch, 2009). Various scholars (e.g., Hennig, 2002; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001) have acknowledged the vital role played by myths and legends in tourism marketing and promotion. Myths and legends are representative of the unique cultural aspects of an ethnic community that differentiates it from the other. Interestingly, Michael Herzfeld calls the making of headhunting as a visible icon of tourism by the indigenous tribes of Sabah, Malaysia as “cultural intimacy” which he describes, “the recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that are considered as a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with the assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld, 1997, 3). The natives of Sabah have embraced their otherness with “a headhunting past” which has become a common ground with which they can respond to the outside world on their indigenusness (Gingging, 2007). Otherness<sup>5</sup> has been used as a theme by marketers to promote places via myths, legends and folk tales (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). Malaysia is one of the countries that employ legends in the promotion of its famous attractions like Langkawi as the authorities are fully aware about the power of legendary tales in attracting tourists. Legends are an important part of Langkawi Island’s promotion as a tourist destination. The inclusion of legends as a description of attractions in Malaysia, projects their indigenusness thereby promoting oriental and otherness themes (Razak, 2010).

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## **ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLK TALES IN PROMOTING CULTURAL TOURISM: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Intangible cultural heritage like myths, legends and folk tales have important historical value. In India, there is a skeleton lake in Uttarakhand who’s mystery was unveiled by scientific testing at

Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) at Hyderabad, whereby three of the DNA samples matches with a particular group of people of Maharashtra and the human skeletons found at Roopkund had injuries on the skulls, suggesting that they may have been caught in an avalanche or a blizzard. According to folk tale Raja Jasdhal and his wife, Garhwali princess Rani Balampa, while undertaking a pilgrimage to Nanda Devi perished in a blizzard near the lake. The mysterious lake attracted interest after some skeletons were found in the region way back in 1942 by a forest ranger (Kazmi; 2009), clearly reiterating that mysterious folk tales thus have the power to attract travelers. It is interesting to note that Government websites too are now citing 'Tribal/folk- culture' as reason to visit (Source: Chattisgarh Tourism).

In Andhra Pradesh 'tolubommalata' in Telugu which means leather puppetry is a folk play where artists travels for nine months a year with their family from village to village and show puppeteers door to door, collect money & rice for their livelihood. Such shows are crowd pullers and an attraction in itself. Kerala tourism promotion, fully projects its folk culture, highlighting Kathakali dance, Kaliapattu marshal art, snake boat race, spa. (Source: Official website and brochures of Kerala Tourism) and they have been successful in their attempt. Incredible India ad campaigns highlights Kathakali folkdance, rural life of Rajasthan and mask dance of Sikkim etc as a tourist attraction thereby emphasizing and using the folk-culture to promote tourism.

Bhaint Dwarka in Gujarat is another place with mythical nature that has attracted a lot of tourists especially hindu pilgrims. The place has stirred the curiosity of archaeologists because of the mythical claim that points out that this place actually had been lord Krishna's original house.

It is safe to say that oral traditions and prose narratives like myths, legends and folk tales enhances the destination's image. In Rajasthan's Amber District, there's a ruined-city which was cursed by a tantric priest who was spurned by princess Ratnavati, the daughter of the then ruler of Amber, Rajasthan Chatr Singh. He tried to cast a spell on her through her maid when he found out she was buying perfume for her but Ratnavati who later came to know, in her anger threw the bottle which later turned into a boulder that hit the tantric crushing him under its weight and before he died he cursed the princess, her family and the entire village. After one year, a battle broke out between the forces of Bhangarh and Ajabgarh which led to the death of Ratnavati and most of the army and left the city into ruins. Till today, no visitor is permitted to enter this ruined-city before sunrise or after sunset. This curse has left a huge dent in the village which is irreparable, forever condemned to desolation and inhabited by ghosts. Furthermore, no one in the village or fort could be reborn and any attempt to build a shelter, remains unsuccessful as the roof mysteriously collapses. This ruined city, though little known yet has attracted many visitors from near and far, and is one of the tourist attractions of Rajasthan.

### **Conclusion**

The projection of fairytales and legends has been a successful promotional strategy for destinations like the Grimm Fairytale Route in Germany and the Dracula Legend in Transylvania in Romania. Similarly, the island of Bali, Indonesia and Langkawi in Malaysia are perfect example of how folk narratives like myths, legends and folk tales are being used for the purpose of cultural tourism. Therefore, folk narratives can be used to promote tourism on a global scale and for the survival of tourism. The Land of Hateg which has the richest heritage and natural

diversity in Romania (Muntean, 2012) is another leading example of integrated tourism promotion model based on Legends which is academically recognized as best practice model in the scientific research magazine of the University of Bucharest (Vilsanescu, 2016). Stories based on legends have inspired people to travel to far off destinations (Laing and Crouch, 2009). Various scholars (e.g. Hennig, 2002; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001) have acknowledged the vital role played by myths and legends in tourism marketing and promotion. Myths and legends are representative of the unique cultural aspects of an ethnic community that differentiates it from the other. These stories provoke the thoughts of people and have great influencing power. Linking stories to tourist's attractions could animate and instigate people to travel. Stories not only instigate but they also enhance the image of a destination. For e.g the sight of a beautiful water fall might enthrall a tourist just like any normal attraction but what makes that water fall unique and stand out is the story (myths, legends and folk tales) connected to it. Intangible Cultural Heritage such as myths, legends and folk tales enhances the image of a tourist attraction and holistically as a cultural tourism resource and can even be a power force leading to successfully sustainable tourism and local development in destination areas (Girard & Nijkamp, 2009).

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