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TOURISM IN RAJASTHAN: DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Tourism has historically been one of the most important components of Rajasthan's service economy because of the state's exceptional combination of historical monuments, forts, palaces, desert landscapes, wildlife, religious centres, fairs, festivals, handicrafts and living cultural traditions. The period from 2006 to 2016 represents an important decade in the development of tourism in Rajasthan. During this period, tourism policy moved progressively from a largely heritage- and monument-oriented approach toward a broader tourism-unit, infrastructure, rural, eco-tourism and experiential approach.

The decade began with the Rajasthan government's 2006 Hotel Policy, which recognized that tourist arrivals were increasing faster than accommodation infrastructure. This was followed by the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2007, which extended incentives beyond star hotels to heritage hotels, resorts, camping sites and other tourism units. Further institutional developments included the Rajasthan Tourism Project Appraisal Guidelines, 2009; the Rajasthan Tourism Trade (Facilitation and Regulation) framework, 2010; the state's eco-tourism policy; the Paying Guest House Scheme, 2012; the Tourist Assistance Force Regulations, 2013; and, most importantly, the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2015. The 2015 policy attempted to integrate tourism with investment promotion, infrastructure development, heritage conservation and rural tourism.

Tourist numbers also expanded considerably during the period. According to the Regional Tourism Satellite Account for Rajasthan, domestic tourist visits increased from approximately 25.56 million in 2009 to 41.50 million in 2016, while foreign tourist visits increased from 1.07 million to 1.51 million. The growth demonstrates the increasing importance of tourism to Rajasthan's economy, although the sector continued to face challenges involving infrastructure, seasonality, regional concentration, environmental pressure, skill development and the uneven distribution of tourism benefits.

Keywords

Rajasthan, tourism development, heritage tourism, rural tourism, eco-tourism, tourism policy, tourist arrivals, infrastructure, 2006–2016.

1. Introduction

Rajasthan occupies a distinctive position on India's tourism map. The state's historical legacy includes Rajput forts, palaces, havelis, temples, stepwells and old cities, while its natural resources include the Thar Desert, Aravalli ranges, lakes, forests and wildlife reserves. Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Ajmer-Pushkar, Bikaner, Mount Abu, Ranthambore and Bharatpur became major components of Rajasthan's tourism geography. Tourism in Rajasthan is not confined to sightseeing. It is closely connected with handicrafts, textiles, folk music and dance, cuisine, fairs and festivals, religious travel, wildlife, adventure tourism and the hospitality industry. Consequently,

tourism has multiplier effects on hotels, restaurants, transport, handicrafts, construction, entertainment and local employment. The period 2006–2016 is particularly significant because Rajasthan entered the decade with a recognized shortage of tourist accommodation and infrastructure. The 2007 Tourism Unit Policy noted that approximately 36,000 tourist rooms were available and projected a requirement for an additional 20,000 rooms by 2012. The policy explicitly stated that infrastructure had not kept pace with increasing tourist numbers. (Rajasthan Tourism) The decade therefore represents a transition from conventional tourism promotion toward a more comprehensive tourism-development strategy.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this research are:

- 1. To examine the development of tourism in Rajasthan between 2006 and 2016.**
- 2. To analyse changes in tourist arrivals during the period.**
- 3. To examine major tourism policies and institutional measures introduced during the decade.**
- 4. To study the development of heritage, rural, eco, wildlife and other forms of tourism.**
- 5. To assess the contribution of infrastructure and hospitality development.**
- 6. To identify the major economic and social impacts of tourism development.**
- 7. To analyse the major challenges that remained at the end of the period.**
- 8. To evaluate the overall transformation of Rajasthan's tourism sector between 2006 and 2016.**

3. Research Methodology

This study is based primarily on secondary data. Information has been collected from:

- Government of Rajasthan, Department of Tourism
- Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
- Regional Tourism Satellite Account (RTSA), Rajasthan
- National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)
- Government policy documents
- Rajasthan Tourism annual progress reports
- Parliamentary and Press Information Bureau documents
- Government reports concerning tourism infrastructure and rural tourism

The study uses descriptive and comparative analysis. Tourist-arrival statistics are examined to understand quantitative growth, while policy documents are analysed to understand the institutional changes responsible for tourism development. A limitation of the study is that tourist-arrival series from different government publications may use different definitions, methodologies and reporting periods. Therefore, the most consistent comparable series used for quantitative analysis is the 2009–2016 series presented in the Rajasthan Regional Tourism Satellite Account.

4. Tourism in Rajasthan at the Beginning of the Period: 2006

The year 2006 can be regarded as an important starting point for analysing this phase of Rajasthan's tourism development. The state government announced a New Hotel Policy in 2006 because tourism was expanding but accommodation infrastructure was insufficient. The subsequent Tourism Unit Policy, 2007 explains that the earlier policy was intended to provide concessions to the hotel sector and increase accommodation capacity. (Rajasthan Tourism) The Government of India was also

supporting tourism infrastructure in Rajasthan. During 2006–07, projects associated with Ajmer Sharif and Jaisalmer, an eco-tourism circuit, monument floodlighting and major tourism events were prioritized. The central government sanctioned approximately ₹653.39 lakh for tourism projects in Rajasthan during 2006–07. (Digital Sansad) Thus, 2006 represents a transition toward a more investment- and infrastructure- oriented tourism strategy.

5. Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2007

One of the most important developments during the decade was the introduction of the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2007. The policy replaced the narrower hotel-oriented approach with a broader definition of a "tourism unit. " It recognized that tourism accommodation included not only conventional hotels but also:

- Heritage hotels
- Holiday resorts
- Camping sites
- Restaurants
- Other tourism-related facilities
- Health spas and wellness activities
- Golf and sports-related facilities

This was important because Rajasthan's tourism product depended heavily on its heritage properties. The policy therefore attempted to convert heritage resources into economically productive tourism assets while also expanding accommodation capacity. (Rajasthan Tourism) Major objectives of the 2007 policy The policy sought to:

- 1. Increase accommodation capacity.**
- 2. Encourage private investment.**
- 3. Promote heritage hotels.**
- 4. Develop tourism infrastructure.**
- 5. Facilitate land availability for tourism projects.**
- 6. Encourage new tourism products.**
- 7. Increase employment and income.**
- 8. Improve the state's ability to accommodate increasing tourist arrivals.**

The government also envisaged the creation of land banks for tourism units, involving development authorities, municipalities, panchayats and district administrations. (Rajasthan Tourism) The policy thus marked an important movement toward public-private participation in tourism development.

6. Infrastructure Development

Tourism cannot expand without supporting infrastructure. Between 2006 and 2016, Rajasthan's tourism development increasingly focused on:

- Hotels and accommodation
- Roads and transportation
- Tourist information facilities
- Monument illumination
- Destination development
- Urban infrastructure
- Heritage conservation
- Rural tourism facilities

- Visitor amenities
- Hospitality services

The infrastructure deficit was explicitly recognized in the 2007 policy. The government estimated that substantial additional hotel capacity would be required to meet future tourist demand. (Rajasthan Tourism) The central government also supported destination and circuit development through schemes for integrated tourist circuits, destination infrastructure and large revenue- generating tourism projects. Rajasthan was included in these national tourism- development programmes. (Digital Sansad) The significance of this approach was that tourism development increasingly moved beyond individual monuments toward destination-level development.

7. Development of Rural Tourism

An important characteristic of the 2006–2016 period was the growing recognition of rural areas as tourism resources. Rajasthan's villages contain distinctive architecture, handicrafts, folk traditions, agricultural landscapes, traditional food and community-based cultural practices. Rural tourism therefore offered an opportunity to diversify tourism beyond Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer. The Government of India supported rural tourism projects in Rajasthan. Earlier projects included Neemrana and Samode, while in 2006–07 financial assistance was provided for infrastructure development at Haldighati in Rajsamand district. (Press Information Bureau) The development of rural tourism was significant for two reasons: First, it expanded the geographical distribution of tourism. Second, it created the possibility of transferring tourism income directly to rural communities through accommodation, handicrafts, cultural performances, food services and local guiding. The 2015 Tourism Unit Policy strengthened this direction by allowing greater use of heritage buildings in rural and panchayat areas as heritage hotels. The government explicitly anticipated that this would stimulate rural tourism. (Rajasthan Tourism)

8. Eco-Tourism and Wildlife Tourism

Rajasthan's tourism economy increasingly diversified during this decade. The state possesses important wildlife destinations such as:

- Ranthambore National Park
- Keoladeo National Park
- Sariska
- Desert National Park
- Tal Chhapar
- Mount Abu and surrounding ecological areas

The state also developed an Eco-Tourism Policy, reflecting growing recognition that natural resources could contribute to tourism while requiring conservation. Rajasthan Foundation identifies the Rajasthan Eco-Tourism Policy, 2010 as one of the state's major tourism policies. (Rajasthan Foundation) Wildlife tourism was particularly important because it reduced dependence on the traditional "forts and palaces" tourism model. Ranthambore, for example, developed into an internationally recognized wildlife destination. Wildlife tourism also generated demand for hotels, safari operators, guides, transport services and local handicrafts. However, the expansion of wildlife tourism also created a challenge: tourism development had to be balanced with ecological carrying capacity and wildlife conservation.

9. Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism remained the foundation of Rajasthan's tourism industry throughout 2006–2016. Major heritage destinations included:

- Jaipur
- Jodhpur
- Udaipur
- Jaisalmer
- Bikaner
- Chittorgarh
- Bundi
- Kota
- Ajmer
- Pushkar
- Alwar

The state's forts and palaces were increasingly treated not only as monuments but also as tourism assets. The growth of heritage hotels was particularly important. Former palaces, havelis and aristocratic residences were adapted for hospitality use, creating an intersection between conservation and commercial tourism. The 2007 policy specifically broadened incentives to include heritage hotels. The 2015 policy subsequently provided additional incentives for heritage properties, including provisions concerning investment eligibility, land conversion, parking and commercial use of heritage buildings. (Rajasthan Tourism) This represented an important development model: Heritage conservation → adaptive reuse → accommodation → tourism income → employment and local economic activity. Nevertheless, commercialization also created questions regarding authenticity, conservation standards and the ownership and distribution of benefits from heritage resources.

10. Regulatory and Institutional Development

The tourism sector became increasingly regulated and institutionalized during the decade. The Rajasthan Tourism Department's policy framework for the period included:

- Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2007
- Rajasthan Tourism Project Appraisal Guidelines, 2009
- Rajasthan Tourism Trade (Facilitation and Regulation) framework, 2010
- Rajasthan Paying Guest House Scheme, 2012
- Tourist Assistance Force Regulations, 2013
- Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2015
- Heritage Certificate Guidelines, 2016

The Department of Tourism currently lists these historical policies and regulations as part of the state's tourism-policy archive. (Rajasthan Tourism) The Rajasthan Paying Guest House Scheme, 2012 was particularly significant because it formally recognized residential premises providing tourist accommodation and created a regulatory framework for such establishments. (Rajasthan Tourism) This helped broaden the accommodation market beyond conventional hotels.

11. Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2015

The Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2015 represented the culmination of many of the policy developments of the preceding decade. It replaced the 2007 policy and was designed to provide stronger support for tourism investment. The policy focused on:

- Time-bound land conversion
- Faster approval of building plans
- Heritage hotel development
- Land allotment for tourism units
- Application of the Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme
- Coordination between government departments
- Infrastructure development
- Employment generation
- Increasing hotel-room availability
- Rural tourism

The policy also expanded the definition of tourism units to cover a wider range of activities, including budget hotels, heritage hotels, resorts, golf courses and adventure sports. (Rajasthan Tourism) This shows a clear shift from a narrow hotel policy toward an integrated tourism-investment policy.

12. Growth in Tourist Arrivals

One of the clearest indicators of tourism development is the number of tourist visits. The Regional Tourism Satellite Account for Rajasthan provides a consistent series from 2009 to 2016: Year Domestic Tourist Visits (million) Foreign Tourist Visits (million) Total (million)

Source: Regional Tourism Satellite Account, Rajasthan, 2015–16; Ministry of Tourism,

Government of India. (Tourism India) The figures demonstrate several important trends. 12.1 Growth of domestic tourism Domestic tourist visits increased from 25.56 million in 2009 to 41.50 million in 2016— an increase of approximately 62%. This was considerably more rapid in absolute terms than foreign tourism. In 2015, Rajasthan received approximately 35.2 million domestic tourist visits, placing it among India's ten leading states in terms of domestic tourist visits. (Press Information Bureau) In 2016, domestic tourist visits rose further to approximately 41.5 million, again placing Rajasthan among India's leading tourism states. (Press Information Bureau) 12.2 Growth of foreign tourism Foreign tourist visits increased from approximately 1.07 million in 2009 to 1.51 million in 2016, representing growth of about 41%. Although the foreign-tourist market was smaller than the domestic market, it remained strategically important because international tourists generally generate higher expenditure per visitor and have strong demand for heritage, culture and luxury tourism. 12.3 Overall growth Combined domestic and foreign tourist visits rose from approximately 26.63 million in 2009 to 43.01 million in 2016, an increase of approximately 61.5%. Thus, by 2016, Rajasthan's tourism economy was operating at a substantially larger scale than at the beginning of the comparable statistical series.

13. Interpretation of Tourism Growth

The growth in tourist arrivals cannot be attributed to one policy alone. Rather, it resulted from the interaction of several factors. 13.1 Heritage resources Rajasthan's forts, palaces, temples and historic cities remained the strongest attraction. 13.2 Improved accommodation The expansion of hotels, heritage properties, resorts and paying guest accommodation increased the state's capacity to host

visitors. 13.3 Improved tourism products The tourism experience expanded from sightseeing to include:

- Wildlife safaris
- Desert tourism
- Rural experiences
- Adventure tourism
- Heritage hotels
- Festivals
- Religious tourism
- Wellness activities
- Handicrafts and shopping
- Luxury tourism

13.4 Government promotion Government campaigns, festivals and destination marketing helped establish Rajasthan as a nationally and internationally recognized tourism brand. 13.5 Growth of domestic tourism The enormous expansion of India's domestic tourism market during the period was an important driver. Rajasthan benefited particularly from weekend travel, family tourism, pilgrimage, educational travel and short cultural holidays.

14. Tourism and Employment

Tourism is labour intensive and therefore has substantial employment potential. Employment is generated directly through:

- Hotels
- Restaurants
- Travel agencies
- Tour operators
- Tourist guides
- Transport
- Museums
- Heritage properties
- Wildlife tourism
- Event management

Indirect employment is generated through:

- Handicrafts
- Textiles
- Jewellery
- Food production
- Construction
- Agriculture
- Local transportation
- Cultural performances

The tourism policies of 2007 and 2015 explicitly connected tourism investment with income and employment generation. The 2015 policy expected increased tourism investment to strengthen infrastructure and generate employment while increasing accommodation capacity. (Rajasthan Tourism)

15. Tourism and Handicrafts

Rajasthan's tourism industry has a particularly strong relationship with handicrafts. Tourists purchase:

- Blue pottery
- Block-printed textiles
- Bandhani
- Carpets
- Leather products
- Jewellery
- Miniature paintings
- Wooden crafts
- Metal crafts
- Marble products

Consequently, tourism provided an important market for artisans. This relationship also created a cultural-economic feedback mechanism: Tourism demand → demand for local products → artisan employment → preservation of traditional skills → enhanced tourism experience. However, commercialization could also produce mass-produced imitations and reduce the authenticity and economic value of traditional crafts.

16. Tourism and Cultural Festivals

Fairs and festivals became an important part of Rajasthan's tourism strategy. Important events included:

- Pushkar Fair
- Desert Festival
- Rajasthan Day
- Heritage Festival
- Teej
- Gangaur
- Marwar Festival
- Mewar Festival
- Camel Festival
- Various local fairs and cultural events

Government support for events was already visible in the 2006–07 tourism projects, when financial assistance was associated with events such as Pushkar Fair, Desert Festival, Heritage Festival and Rajasthan Day celebrations. (Digital Sansad) Festivals helped tourism in two ways. First, they created a reason to visit Rajasthan at particular times of the year. Second, they provided a platform for local culture, crafts, music, dance and cuisine.

17. Tourism and Regional Development

One of the major challenges in Rajasthan has been the concentration of tourism in a limited number of destinations. Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Pushkar and Ranthambore attracted a disproportionately large share of visitors. Tourism policies attempted to encourage diversification through:

- Rural tourism
- Eco-tourism

- Wildlife tourism
- Heritage tourism
- New destination development
- Circuit-based tourism

The development of rural tourism and heritage properties outside major cities was particularly important because it offered a mechanism for spreading tourism expenditure to smaller towns and villages.

18. Major Problems During 2006–2016

Despite considerable development, Rajasthan's tourism sector continued to face structural problems.

18.1 Infrastructure gaps The 2007 policy itself acknowledged that infrastructure had not kept pace with tourist growth. (Rajasthan Tourism) Problems included:

- Road connectivity
- Public transport
- Water supply
- Sanitation
- Parking
- Tourist amenities
- Accommodation in emerging destinations

18.2 Seasonal tourism Tourism in Rajasthan is strongly seasonal, with relatively high visitor concentrations during the cooler months. Seasonality creates:

- Fluctuating hotel occupancy
- Temporary employment
- Uneven business revenue
- Pressure on destinations during peak periods

18.3 Geographic concentration Major destinations received substantially greater investment and visitor flows than many lesser-known destinations. 18.4 Environmental pressure Wildlife tourism, desert tourism and rapid construction can place pressure on fragile ecosystems. 18.5 Heritage conservation Adaptive reuse of historic buildings creates economic opportunities but also requires careful conservation. 18.6 Skill shortages Expansion of hotels and tourism services increases the demand for trained personnel in:

- Hospitality
- Food production
- Guiding
- Foreign languages
- Travel management
- Heritage interpretation
- Wildlife tourism

18.7 Unequal distribution of benefits Tourism income does not automatically reach local communities. Without community participation, large tourism establishments can capture a disproportionate share of economic benefits.

19. Overall Assessment of 2006–2016

The decade can be divided into three broad phases. Phase I: 2006–2008 — Infrastructure and Accommodation The primary concern was to increase accommodation capacity and encourage

investment. The 2006 Hotel Policy and 2007 Tourism Unit Policy were central to this phase. Phase II: 2009–2013 — Diversification and Regulation The state increasingly developed new tourism products and regulatory mechanisms. Important developments included:

- Project appraisal guidelines
- Eco-tourism
- Tourism trade regulation
- Rural tourism
- Paying guest accommodation
- Tourist assistance mechanisms

Phase III: 2014–2016 — Integrated Tourism Investment The 2015 Tourism Unit Policy represented a more mature approach. Tourism became increasingly connected with:

- Investment promotion
- Infrastructure
- Heritage conservation
- Rural tourism
- Employment
- Hospitality
- Adventure tourism
- Destination diversification

The availability of annual progress reports for the Tourism Department from 2013–14 through 2016–17 also reflects the increasingly systematic administrative monitoring of the sector. (Rajasthan Tourism)

20. Comparative Summary: 2006 vs. 2016

Dimension Around 2006 By 2016 Policy approach Hotel/infrastructure focused Integrated tourism-unit approach Accommodation Recognized shortage Greater diversification of accommodation Heritage Major attraction Heritage increasingly integrated with hospitality Rural tourism Emerging More formally integrated into policy Eco-tourism Emerging Institutionalized as a policy area Wildlife tourism Important niche Major tourism product Paying guest accommodation Less formalized Formal scheme introduced in 2012 Tourism regulation Developing More comprehensive Private investment Encouraged More strongly integrated with investment policy Domestic tourism Important Very large and rapidly expanding Foreign tourism Major market Continued growth but slower than domestic tourism Tourism products Forts, palaces, culture Heritage + wildlife + rural + desert + adventure + experiential tourism

21. Major Findings

The study produces the following major findings:

Finding 1

The period 2006–2016 was a major phase of institutional transformation in Rajasthan tourism.

Finding 2

The government moved from a narrow hotel-development approach toward a broad definition of tourism units.

Finding 3

Heritage remained the core tourism resource, but the sector diversified into rural, eco, wildlife, adventure and experiential tourism.

Finding 4

Domestic tourism became the major quantitative driver of growth.

Finding 5

Between 2009 and 2016, domestic tourist visits increased by roughly 62%, while foreign visits increased by roughly 41%. (Tourism India)

Finding 6

The 2015 Tourism Unit Policy represented a significant policy upgrade by linking tourism with investment, infrastructure, heritage and rural development.

Finding 7

Tourism created economic opportunities beyond hotels, particularly for transport operators, artisans, guides, restaurants and local service providers.

Finding 8

The main weaknesses remained infrastructure gaps, seasonality, destination concentration, environmental pressure and uneven distribution of tourism benefits.

22. Conclusion

The period 2006–2016 can be described as a decade of consolidation, diversification and institutionalization of tourism in Rajasthan. At the beginning of the period, the state faced a basic problem: tourism demand was increasing, but infrastructure and accommodation capacity were insufficient. The 2006 Hotel Policy and the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy, 2007 responded to this challenge by encouraging investment and expanding the definition of tourism infrastructure. During the following years, the concept of tourism development became broader. Tourism was no longer viewed simply as visits to forts, palaces and monuments. Rural tourism, eco-tourism, wildlife, adventure activities, paying guest accommodation, heritage hotels and cultural festivals increasingly became part of the tourism- development framework. The 2015 Tourism Unit Policy represented the maturity of this process. It attempted to integrate tourism with investment promotion, infrastructure development, heritage conservation, rural development and employment generation. (Rajasthan Tourism) The quantitative evidence confirms that this period coincided with substantial tourism growth. Domestic tourist visits increased from 25.56 million in 2009 to 41.50 million in 2016, while foreign visits increased from 1.07 million to 1.51 million. Total recorded visits therefore increased from approximately 26.63 million to 43.01 million during the comparable period. (Tourism India) The significance of the decade, however, lies not only in the number of tourists. It lies in the transformation of Rajasthan into a multi-product tourism destination. Heritage, wildlife, rural life, handicrafts, festivals, desert landscapes and hospitality became interconnected components of the tourism economy. At the same time, the experience of 2006–2016 demonstrates that increasing tourist numbers alone cannot be considered sufficient evidence of sustainable tourism development. Future development requires stronger local participation, better infrastructure, environmental management, heritage conservation, skilled human resources, destination diversification and equitable distribution of tourism income. Overall, the decade laid much of the institutional and infrastructural foundation on which Rajasthan's subsequent tourism development was built. It marked the transition from traditional heritage tourism toward a diversified and investment-oriented tourism economy.

Table: Growth in Tourist Arrivals, 2009–2016

Year	Domestic Tourist Visits (million)	Foreign Tourist Visits (million)	Total (million)
2009	25.56	1.07	26.63
2010	25.54	1.28	26.82
2011	27.14	1.35	28.49
2012	28.61	1.45	30.06
2013	30.30	1.44	31.74
2014	33.08	1.53	34.61
2015	35.19	1.48	36.67
2016	41.50	1.51	43.01

Source: Regional Tourism Satellite Account, Rajasthan, 2015–16; Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. (Tourism India)

Comparative Summary: 2006 vs. 2016

Dimension	Around 2006	By 2016
Policy approach	Hotel/infrastructure focused	Integrated tourism-unit approach
Accommodation	Recognized shortage	Greater diversification of accommodation
Heritage	Major attraction	Heritage increasingly integrated with hospitality
Rural tourism	Emerging	More formally integrated into policy
Eco-tourism	Emerging	Institutionalized as a policy area
Wildlife tourism	Important niche	Major tourism product
Paying guest accommodation	Less formalized	Formal scheme introduced in 2012
Tourism regulation	Developing	More comprehensive
Private investment	Encouraged	More strongly integrated with investment policy
Domestic tourism	Important	Very large and rapidly expanding
Foreign tourism	Major market	Continued growth but slower than domestic tourism
Tourism products	Forts, palaces, culture	Heritage + wildlife + rural + desert + adventure + experiential tourism

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