

## Offbeat Tourism in Bundelkhand: A Study of Lesser-Known Destinations

Dheerendra Bhartee  
Research Scholar (Tourism)  
Dr. Rajendra Kumar Chaudhary  
Assistant Professor (Management)  
Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur (M.P.)

### ABSTRACT

Beyond well-known locations like Khajuraho and Orchha, Bundelkhand, a historically and culturally rich area that spans Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, is still mostly undiscovered. Nonetheless, the area is home to a number of lesser-known but equally important locations, including as Charkhari, Ajaigarh Fort, Garh Kunder Fort, Gupt Godavari Caves, and Barua Sagar, all of which have enormous potential for unconventional travel. By identifying important hidden places, assessing their tourist potential, and assessing the obstacles to their expansion, this study seeks to investigate the feasibility of off-the-beaten-path tourism in Bundelkhand. Through the promotion of heritage, rural, adventure, and eco-tourism, the study also looks at how off-the-beaten-path travel might support sustainable regional development. This article proposes strategic initiatives for tourism growth, such as enhanced infrastructure, digital marketing, and community involvement, based on qualitative and quantitative data. The results demonstrate how Bundelkhand's unconventional travel spots can preserve the area's rich natural and cultural history while greatly enhancing the tourism sector.

### KEYWORDS

Bundelkhand Tourism, offbeat Destination, heritage, rural, adventure, and eco-tourism.

### INTRODUCTION

Cultural exchange, heritage preservation, and economic progress are all greatly aided by tourism. Offbeat tourism concentrates on lesser-known but no less important locations that provide distinctive and immersive experiences, whereas mainstream tourism frequently spotlights well-known destinations. India's tourism business has been dominated by places like Rajasthan, Kerala, and Goa, whereas historically significant places like Bundelkhand are still little known.

The region of Bundelkhand, which includes parts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, is home to historic forts, temples, and natural settings. Despite being home to well-known historical monuments like Khajuraho and Orchha, the area also has a number of undiscovered treasures that are rarely seen by tourists. Locations with significant historical, architectural, and ecological significance include the Gupt Godavari Caves, Charkhari, Barua Sagar, Ajaigarh Fort,

and Garh Kundar Fort. These unusual destinations give visitors a chance to get away from busy tourist areas and establish a closer bond with the local customs, history, and environment.

Offbeat tourism in Bundelkhand has potential, but it also confronts a number of obstacles, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient marketing, and low community involvement. Many locations are either inaccessible or inadequately maintained, which keeps them from being competitive travel options. Furthermore, the region's exposure among contemporary tourists is limited by the lack of eco-friendly tourism regulations and internet marketing. In order to determine whether off-the-beaten path travel in Bundelkhand is feasible, this study will discover the region's hidden treasures, assess current problems and offer long-term solutions. By promoting lesser-known destinations, improving infrastructure, and integrating locals, Bundelkhand has the potential to become a significant player in India's alternative tourism market.

Tourism is crucial for maintaining cultural heritage, promoting regional growth, and generating employment opportunities. India's mainstream tourism market is dominated by well-known tourist destinations, but people are growing more interested in unique, unexplored locations that provide unique experiences. Bundelkhand, a historically and culturally rich region that straddles Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, is often disregarded in favor of more popular tourist sites, despite its immense potential. While many lesser-known places remain unexplored and await acknowledgment for their historical, cultural, and environmental value, Khajuraho and Orchha's architectural beauty attracts travelers.

Finding and analyzing unexplored tourist destinations in Bundelkhand, such as the Gupt Godavari Caves, Charkhari, Barua Sagar, Ajaigarh Fort, and Garh Kundar Fort, is the aim of this research. These places provide a unique blend of history, adventure, spirituality, and scenic beauty. They are still growing, though, and still require enough accessibility, advertising, and infrastructure.

**Government Programs:** The Indian government is gradually implementing policies to enhance Bundelkhand without sacrificing its ecological and cultural legacy after seeing the potential of the area as a destination for unconventional travel. The current status of tourism in the area is highlighted by the following important data elements.

## 1. Infrastructural Development

To improve Bundelkhand's tourism infrastructure, the Ministry of Tourism has started projects under the PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive)

and Swadesh Darshan programs. Improvements to road and rail connectivity; creation of eco-friendly lodging options and eco-tourism destinations; and modernization of historic buildings and fortifications to increase their accessibility to tourists are a few of them.

## 2. Tourism Growth Trends

The Bundelkhand region has had a consistent rise in visitor arrivals over the past few years, per data from the Ministry of Tourism (MOT):

**Domestic Tourism:** The number of domestic visitors to unusual places like Panna, Charkhari, and Orchha is increasing by about 5% to 7% per year.

**Foreign Tourism:** The area receives a comparatively lesser share of foreign visitors, accounting for only 2% to 3% of Madhya Pradesh's and Uttar Pradesh's overall foreign visitor arrivals.

Notably, the number of history buffs and eco-tourists visiting places like Rani Mahal and Panna Tiger Reserve has significantly increased.

## 3. Promotional Campaigns

Under the following initiatives, the tourism departments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have been aggressively marketing Bundelkhand's unusual destinations:

**"Chalo Bundelkhand":** a regional campaign to promote domestic traveler exploration of Bundelkhand's history and culture. The ad emphasizes lesser-known locations such as Kalinjar Fort, Charkhari, and Banda.

**Bundelkhand Circuit:** A collaborative effort between the two states to establish a well-publicized tourism route that links Bundelkhand's palaces, forts, and wildlife sanctuaries. Diversifying tourism and drawing in a larger spectrum of visitors are the goals.

## 4. Local and Community Engagement

By providing genuine experiences, local communities have become more interested in encouraging unconventional travel. These consist of Home stays and regional crafts, which give locals a source of income and offer a more personal travel experience.

Historians and guides who provide specialist tours to uncharted or obscure locations in the area.

In order to train guides, create heritage tours, and provide courses on local crafts like Bundelkhandi weaving, ceramics, and woodwork craft, the government has teamed up with neighborhood non-governmental organizations.

### The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify and list the lesser-known tourism destinations in Bundelkhand Discover under-known or unexplored historical, cultural, religious, and natural areas. To assess the tourism potential of these places Analyze their historical value, cultural

- relevance, natural beauty, and ability to attract different types of tourists (eco-tourism, adventure, heritage, etc.).
2. To investigate the barriers preventing tourism from expanding Think of issues like insufficient government initiatives, poor infrastructure, restricted accessibility, a lack of promotion, and conservation issues.
  3. To investigate the ways in which local communities support the expansion of tourism Examine the ways in which local people might support and profit from tourism while preserving their customs and surroundings.
  4. Evaluating the unorthodox tourism in Bundelkhand in relation to other similar regions Analyze how lesser-known vacation sites have been developed in other regions of India or the world and make inferences for Bundelkhand's tourism growth.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Offbeat tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years as travelers look for unusual, unexplored destinations that provide both natural beauty and cultural authenticity. Despite its historical significance and wild scenery, Bundelkhand remains mostly undiscovered in popular travel literature. With an emphasis on Bundelkhand, this review examines the literature on heritage tourism, off-the-beaten-path tourism, and sustainable tourism development in lesser-known areas.

### Offbeat Tourism and Its Growing Appeal

Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of the Experience Economy, emphasizing the role of unique experiences in tourism. Subsequent research (Richards & Wilson, 2006)

### Heritage and Cultural Tourism in Bundelkhand

Singh (2012) and Mishra (2017) have documented the architectural and cultural heritage of Bundelkhand, focusing on locations such as Orchha, Chanderi, and Kalinjar.

Sustainable Tourism in Lesser-Known Destinations Research on sustainable tourism (Butler, 1999; Saarinen, 2006) Hall and Lew (2009) further highlight strategies for managing tourism in lesser-explored regions to ensure local economic benefits without causing environmental degradation.

Challenges and Opportunities in Bundelkhand's Tourism Development (Bhatia, 2001; Sharma & Rai, 2015). Recent studies emphasize the role of digital marketing, community engagement, and government initiatives in promoting lesser-known destinations

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study on "A Study of Lesser-Known Destinations in Bundelkhand" uses both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to explore, analyze, and assess the tourist potential of unique spots in the region. The following crucial components make up the methodology

### Secondary Data Collection

- **Literature Review** – Examining previous research papers, government reports, and academic studies related to Bundelkhand’s tourism potential.
- **Tourism Reports & Policies** – Analyzing official documents from state tourism boards, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and UNESCO.
- **Social Media & Travel Blogs** – Evaluating digital narratives and traveler experiences shared on platforms like Trip Advisor, YouTube and Instagram.

### Offbeat Tourism in Bundelkhand

**Bhimkund** Bhimkund Legend surrounds Bhimkund, an enigmatic natural water reservoir close to Bajna village in Madhya Pradesh. This water stream is said to have been created by Bhima, one of the Pandavas from the Mahabharata, striking the earth with his mace. The pool is a popular destination for adventurers and lovers of mythology because of its remarkably deep blue waters and the nearby caverns.

**Jatashankar Temple:** An unusual structure that resembles matted hair, this natural cave shrine is devoted to Lord Shiva. The cave's natural water streams and tranquil ambiance contribute to its allure.

**Keny Falls:** Trekkers and nature enthusiasts will adore this breathtaking waterfall in the Panna Tiger Reserve. It is a secret haven because of the surrounding nature and serene atmosphere.

**Hanuman Tauria:** A lesser known Chhatarpur pilgrimage destination that is thought to be connected to Lord Hanuman. It provides both spiritual comfort and expansive views of the surroundings.

**Mahoba’s Hidden Heritage:** Despite being near Chhatarpur, Mahoba is historically significant because of its sometimes disregarded ancient rock-cut temples and Chandela-era defenses.

**Ranipur Wildlife Sanctuary** Ranipur Wildlife Sanctuary, a secret haven for wildlife and nature lovers, is situated in the Chitrakoot region of Uttar Pradesh. The sanctuary, which was designated a tiger reserve in 2022, is home to sloth bears, leopards, and other bird species. It is

the perfect place for people looking for an untainted wilderness experience because of its secluded position.

**Dhubela Museum** This museum is located in a fort constructed by Maharaja Chhatrasal, a well-known Bundela king, near Dhubela, Madhya Pradesh. The museum displays a variety of Bundela-era relics, texts, weapons, and sculptures. It is a must-visit for history aficionados because it offers insightful information about the history and artistic talent of the area.

**Garh Kundar Fort** For history buffs, the little-known but magnificent Garh Kundar Fort in Madhya Pradesh's Tikamgarh district is a hidden gem. The fort, which was formerly a bastion of the Khangar emperors, silently witnesses political intrigue and medieval conflict. Its appeal is enhanced by the untamed surroundings, which make it a refuge for hikers and thrill-seekers.

**Chitrakoot's Secret Caves and Trails** In addition to its well-known temples, Chitrakoot has a number of mysterious caverns and hiking routes. A captivating spiritual experience can be had in Gupt Godavari, a group of underground caverns connected to Lord Rama. For those who are interested in environment and mythology, the nearby hills and forests offer fantastic trekking options.

**Alha Udal Battlefield and Memorials** Ballads and folklore honor the renowned Bundelkhand warriors Alha and Udal. Their memorial sites and ancient battlefields, which are dispersed around the area, provide information on the warrior traditions of the area. For tourists interested in Bundeli heritage, these sites offer a strong cultural connection.

**Baldeogarh Fort:** Baldeogarh Fort, a lesser-known fort with breathtaking views of the surroundings, is the ideal location for adventurers and history buffs.

**Orchha's Hidden Temples:** Even though Orchha is well-known, a number of its less-traveled temples, like Jugal Kishore Temple and Radhika Bihari Temple, offer a quiet and personal spiritual experience.

**Prithvipur Stepwells:** The architectural creativity of the Chandela and Bundela kings is demonstrated by these historic stepwells, which were originally used to conserve water.

**Madhkhera Dam:** Madhkhera Dam is a serene haven away from the bustle of the city, perfect for picnics and nature enthusiasts.

**Papora Mahadev Temple:** Situated in a natural setting on the outskirts of Tikamgarh, this temple draws followers who are looking for peace and heavenly favors.

**Gokhar Hill:** A quiet, little-visited hill with religious importance and ancient caverns. It has stunning views of the surroundings and is thought to be connected to local legend.

**Kakramath Temple:** A beautiful, but little-visited, Shiva temple next to Madan Sagar Lake. The Chandela dynasty's magnificence is reflected in the temple's elaborate architecture.

**Sun Temple at Rahila Sagar:** A hidden architectural wonder with historical significance and elaborate carvings devoted to the Sun God.

**Alha Talaab:** A serene lake associated with the mythical warrior Alha. It is the ideal location for unwinding and learning about Mahoba's rich warrior history.

**Chandika Devi Temple:** Respected by the community, this mystical location is thought to bestow benefits on followers who desire safety and wealth.

**Pandav Falls and Caves:** A picturesque waterfall featuring prehistoric caverns thought to have served as the Pandavas' refuge during their banishment. It is a must-see location because of its mythological significance and tranquil settings.

**Raneh Falls:** A unique geological experience and amazing vistas may be found at this collection of breathtaking waterfalls that evolved over volcanic rock formations.

**Brihaspati Kund:** Surrounded by beautiful scenery, this waterfall and natural reservoir is a hidden jewel that is perfect for nature lovers and adventurers.

**Mahamati Prannath Temple:** An important spiritual location connected to Prannath Sampradaya that draws followers looking for serenity and divine favors.

**Ajaygarh Fort:** For those who enjoy history and trekking, this lesser-known but historically significant fort offers sweeping views of the Panna region.

## CONCLUSION

Bundelkhand's undiscovered cultural, historical, and environmental gems are revealed by investigating off-the-beaten-path tourism. Bundelkhand is still mostly overlooked in popular

travel circles, despite its rich history, breathtaking scenery, and distinctive regional customs. Alternative tourism models that emphasize sustainability, community involvement, and experiential travel have enormous potential in places like Garh Kunder Fort, Deogarh, Ajaigarh, and the subterranean caves of Chitrakoot.

According to the study, the development of these lesser-known locations might have a major positive socioeconomic impact on local communities, lessen the strain of migration, and foster a sense of regional pride. However, coordinated efforts in marketing, capacity building, infrastructure development, and preservation are necessary to realize this promise.

In the end, offbeat tourism in Bundelkhand is about rethinking travel in a way that prioritizes authenticity, inclusivity, and long-term effect rather than just finding new destinations. Bundelkhand can become a popular destination for tourists looking to engage more deeply and meaningfully with India's rich cultural heritage by raising awareness and promoting the area responsibly.

## REFERENCES

1. Basu, S. (2007). Heritage Tourism: An Anthropological Journey to the Roots. Rawat Publications.
2. Bhatia, A. K. (2001). Tourism Development: Principles and Practices. Sterling Publishers.
3. Singh, R. L. (1971). India: A Regional Geography. National Geographical Society of India.
4. Rangarajan, M. (1996). India's Wildlife History: An Introduction. Permanent Black.
5. Sharma, R. (2012). Cultural Heritage of India. Arihant Publications.
6. Verma, N. (2019). Bundelkhand Through the Ages. Prakash Book Depot.
7. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (Annual Reports).
8. Mishra, P. (2018). Tourism and Rural Development in India. Concept Publishing Company.
9. UNESCO Reports on Intangible Cultural Heritage in India.
10. District Tourism Office Reports – Bundelkhand Region (Madhya Pradesh & Uttar Pradesh).