

STUDY: TOURISM RECREATIONAL VALUE OF ROCK GARDEN CHANDIGARH, INDIA



Chandigarh, a well-planned and modern city of India, is known for its urban parks and gardens worldwide. Among various tourist places of the city, Nek Chand's Rock Garden assumes premier importance for the tourists. Unlike other parks and gardens of the city, it consists of a series of interconnected rocky grottoes, walkways, landscaped waterfalls and thousands of animal or humanoid figures made out of waste and discarded materials. It nestles amidst 10 ha of woods in the form of an open air exhibition hall, theatre trove and a miniature maze, all rolled into one vast fantasy land of art and landscape. This garden is a monument of international importance which addresses the global problem of balancing industrial development with sustainable development of environment. The Rock Garden, Chandigarh may rightly be called as one of the modern wonders of the world and has clear potential to be a heritage site.

A case study was undertaken during 2002-04 by using travel cost method on the domestic tourists. The basic premise of this method is that the time and travel cost expenses which tourists incur to visit a site represent the "price" of access to that particular site. Thus, people's willingness to pay to visit the site can be found out based on the number of trips that they make at different travel costs.

It was found that this strange and whimsical garden account for about seventy percent of annual recreational use value accruing to the city's overall urban parks and gardens from the view point of domestic tourists. Rock Garden was rated as number one tourist spot in the city by the domestic tourists. Therefore this garden deserves an annual recreational value of Rs. 64.68 million (€1.024.920) out of Rs. 92.40 million (€1.464.450) value accruing to all parks and gardens of the city from domestic tourists' point of view based on 2002-03 price level. This is a conservative estimate of annual tourism recreational value of Rock Garden, Chandigarh because data from foreign tourists has not been considered in the analysis.

The average annual expenditure on maintenance as well as expansion of this garden for the past seven years is around Rs. 36 lakh (€ 57.067) whereas the annual tourism value of the garden is Rs. 650 lakh (€1.030.520), which is about 18 times higher than the amount spent on garden's maintenance and expansion. Therefore seeing the enormous tourism value of Rock Garden, the Chandigarh administration must pay more attention to urban parks of the city in general and to this unique site, in particular, so that city may earn due respect from domestic as well as foreign tourists.

Majority of the tourists mentioned that they had not visited such kind of garden in the past and according to them Rock garden presented a wonderful example of environmental conservation by creating beauty out of waste. About 89 % of tourist families considered that urban parks and gardens of the city were responsible to the extent of more than seventy five percent in making city attractive from tourism point of view and other features of the city like its unique architecture,

infrastructure, culture etc accounted for less than twenty five percent weight age in this regard.

It is worth mentioning that the Rock Garden creation work done by Mr. Nek Chand at Chandigarh has been lauded in most of the European countries, USA and Australia. The first significant recognition of his work came from Paris. The highest distinction (Grand Medaille de Vermeil) that the Municipality of Paris can bestow on any one has been conferred on Mr. Nek Chand in 1980. As of now, there are six gardens on the like of Rock Garden outside India - two in France, two in Germany and two in Britain, all created under the able guidance & supervision of Mr. Nek Chand.

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