The Hill Forts of Rajasthan, India

Overview
The Hill Forts of Rajasthan are presented as a serial nomination of six sites located on rocky outcrops of the Aravallis mountain range in the south-eastern part of Rajasthan and in the desert of western Rajasthan of India. They represent Rajput military hill architecture of the 8th to 18th centuries, which optimises the defensive properties of the terrain.

All six properties share multi-gated approaches, which provide access through massive and often high fortification walls, as well as central palace areas, temples, memorials and water reservoirs within the inner boundaries.

The property consists of:
- Chittorgarh Fort
- Kumbhalgarh Fort, Rajsamand, Udaipur
- Ranthambore Fort, Sawai Madhopur
- Gagron Fort, Jhalawar
- Amber Fort, Jaipur
- Jaisalmer Fort, Jaisalmer.
The Hill Forts of Rajasthan exhibit an important interchange of Princely Rajput ideologies in fort planning, art and architecture from the early medieval to late medieval period, within the varied physiographic and cultural zones of Rajasthan.

**Chittorgarh** is strongly associated with Rajput history and folklore. Furthermore, the sheer number and variety of architectural remains of early date (ranging from the 8th to the 16th centuries) mark it as an exceptional fort in its scale and monumentality comparable to very few other Indian forts. **Kumbhalgarh** was constructed in a single process and retains its architectural coherence.

Situated in the middle of forest, **Ranthambore** is an established example of forest hill fort and in addition, the remains of the palace of Hammir are among the oldest surviving structures of an Indian palace. **Gagron** is an exemplar of a river-protected fort.

**Amber Palace** is representative of a key phase (17th century) in the development of a common Rajput-Mughal court style, embodied in the buildings and gardens added to Amber by Mirza Raja Jai Singh I.

**Jaisalmer** is an example of a hill fort in desert terrain. The extensive township contained within it from the outset, still inhabited today, and the group of Jain temples, make it an important example of a sacred and secular (urban) fort.

**UNESCO Listing**

The six forts - Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh, Jaisalmer, Ranthambore (Sawai Madhopur), Gagron (Jhalawar) and Amber (Jaipur) - were recognized as serial World Heritage Sites in the 37th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The state government had sent the nomination dossier of the forts to the World Heritage Site center in January 2011. A two-member team from the advisory body of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
had met state government and ASI officials in Jaipur in November 2012. Following this, the ICOMOS recommended that the hill forts be made part of the World Heritage Site list in 2013.

**Administrative Structure**

Four of the forts are protected by the Central Government Agency, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and two by the Rajasthan State Archaeological Survey.

- Amber Fort, Jaipur (State Government)
- Gagron Water Fort, Jhalawar (State Government)
- Ranthambore Fort, Sawai Madhopur (Central Government)
- Kumbhalgarh Fort (Central Government)
- Jaisalmer Fort, Jaisalmer (Central Government)
- Chittorgarh Fort (Central Government)

The overall management of the six properties is steered by the State Level Apex Advisory Committee, which was established in May 2011. It is chaired by the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan and comprises members of the concerned ministries, namely Environment & Forests, Urban Development and Housing, Tourism, Art, Literature & Culture, Energy and various representatives of the heritage sector including the ASI.

The Apex Advisory Committee meets on a quarterly basis and is designed to constitute the overall management framework of the serial property, guide the local management of the six serial components, coordinate cross-cutting initiatives, share research and documentation, share conservation and management practices and address the requirements of common interpretative resources.

To implement the recommendations of the Apex Advisory Committee, the Amber Development and Management Authority, acts as an overarching authority for management implementation.

There are Management Plans designed to cover the period 2011 to 2015 for five of the six sites. For Jaisalmer, the Management Plan for the property along with sub-plans including visitor management, risk preparedness, and livelihood generation for the local population, is expected to be completed by end of 2013.
Challenges

Within the forts, there are acknowledged development pressures derived from continued encroachment and enlargement of residential communities:

1. The wider setting of Chittorgarh is vulnerable to urban development as well as industrial and mining activities that cause notable air pollution

2. At Jaisalmer the wider setting and views to and from the fort could be vulnerable to certain types of urban development in the surrounding town

3. The stability of the overall hill on which Jaisalmer rests is vulnerable to water seepage as a result of the lack of adequate infrastructure

4. At Gagron the setting could be under threat from unregulated construction

5. The original exterior plaster at Amber Fort and Gagron Fort has been replaced, which has caused a loss of historic material and patina

6. At Chittorgarh and Kumbhalgarh Forts, there are structures in a state of progressive decay or collapse, which are vulnerable to losing their authenticity in material, substance, workmanship and design

7. At Jaisalmer within the urban area, individual buildings are in need of improved conservation approaches.
Opportunities

To comply with the UNESCO Guidelines and to reverse the vulnerabilities of certain individual structures within the forts, there is a need for both long-term and short-term conservation actions. Apart from conservation work inside the site, there would be a requirement for marketing/promotion-related services for the sites as well.

The work on the sites would be the responsibility of various agencies, most prominent being the Department of Arts & Culture and the Department of Tourism.

The Arts & Culture department will be the administrative hub for the fort sites project and it would be working with the State Archeological Survey. Together, they would be responsible for the conservation work inside the actual sites.
• The potential opportunities for actual conservation work would focus on the technical aspects related to materials, stone work and architecture. There is a requirement of modern conservation approaches keeping in mind the geography of the area and the water situation (particularly in case of Jaisalmer and Gagron).

• Conservation of the extremely extensive fortifications and ensembles of palaces, temples and other buildings will call for extensive skills and resources.

• A capacity building strategy to raise awareness of the importance and value of these skills, as part of an approach to livelihood generation, could be considered.

• In order to ensure a clear understanding of how each of the forts contributes to the series as a whole, there is a need for improved interpretation as part of an interpretation strategy for the overall series.

• The Tourism department would look after mainly the 360 degree marketing aspects of the sites. This would cover the buffer zone outside the fort sites and that would include potential opportunities in the area of Strategic Destination Development and Marketing services covering:
  - Information kiosks, Interpretation centres, Audio-visual guides
  - Visitor service marketing
  - Audience development, ie. Raising awareness of the tourism sites
  - Visitor tracking technologies
  - Multimedia presentations / cultural programs as values additions to maintain the tourist interest once the site shuts down.

• For future scope, if the offerings from interested parties are found suitable for the UNESCO sites, they would also like to apply the same to other heritage sites across the state including step wells (being planned as heritage sites), shekhawati paintings, havelis etc.

Current Status (as at December 2013)

Considering recent developments, an update of the status of the project is in order:

1. A project management plan for the fort sites project is being prepared by few state-empaneled consultants. Austrade has been in touch with the consultants regarding information on latest developments.

2. Once the report for the plan is completed in about 2-3 months, the state government would be ready to come out with expressions of interest regarding the actual conservation work followed by the marketing related work. Hence, this timeframe before the EOIs could be utilised to showcase relevant offerings in the Heritage Conservation and Cultural Precinct marketing space.

3. The UNESCO team has been periodically visiting Rajasthan to examine the sites. The state government is aware of the fact that if the quality of conservation work is not up to the standard, there is a possibility of UNESCO delisting the sites.

4. A State of Conservation Report is has to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2015, reporting on progress with the conservation project at Jaisalmer, and conservation work at Chittorgarh and Kumbhalgarh Forts, which will be examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session in 2015.

5. The state elections in Rajasthan have resulted in the change of the leadership as on 8th December, 2013. With the new political leadership coming in, there could be a change in the strategy concerning the fort sites. Hence, it would be prudent to track the change of guard in the state government. The next couple of Months could be crucial to understand how the new state govt. views this conservation project. Austrade would be tracking the same through its govt. contacts.
6. However, irrespective of the change of govt., a recommended course of action would be to get in touch with the government departments, local conservation agencies and consultants to discuss offerings before the expressions of interest are floated. This could then lead to collaboration for niche offerings.

Next steps

1. Identify if you have relevant offerings suited to the Hill Forts project. Having experience in India or suitable business models from similar Markets would be beneficial.

2. Forward details on the relevant offerings which can then be suitably discussed with government departments and potential partners.

3. Visit India in 2014 to build professional networks, contact government agencies and meet potential partners.

Key contacts

For more information please contact:

Avinash Sharma  
Business Development Manager  
Austrade Jaipur  
T +91 141 4567790  
E avinash.sharma@austrade.gov.au

Sonali Saigal  
Business Development Manager  
Austrade New Delhi  
T +91 11 45756232  
E sonali.saigal@austrade.gov.au