

Prospects and Challenges of Spiritual Tourism in India and its impact on Economy

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Abstract

Spirituality in tourism as such, is a progressively more essential focus of interest to researchers globally. Tourism in this area is considered to be a key and growing industry and it is a relatively new dimension of a modern tourism practice. The spiritual dimension has always been and will remain a major motivator for tourist for exploring religious and spiritual destination. We need to understand and outline a strategy after understanding that not all visitors to a spiritual destination are 'pious travellers'. Understanding the motives of their visit is the key that will unlock the door for an ideal strategy.

Key words – Spiritual, Tourism, Economy.

Introduction

Tourism is an age old activity associated with civilized nations. Thus, tourism literature too has a long history. However, there are few areas in tourism which have come to the domain of scientific investigation only recently. Tourism is considered vital for many countries, due to the revenue generated by the consumption of goods and services by tourists, the taxes levied on businesses in the tourism industry, and the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. Tourism has its own direct and indirect effect on society which is regarded as an effective instrument of country's economic development. Tourism industry fosters a country's economy development, restores cultural heritage, and helps in maintaining international relations. Tourism in India is not only generating value for the country, but also led to the development of a accomplished workforce. Growth is driven by a combination of expansion in income levels and routine changes, the development of a diversity of tourist offers, policy and regulatory carry by the government.

Highlights of Indian Tourism Industry

- The number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India 2016 increased to 8.8 million as compared to 8.03 million in 2015. The growth rate in FTAs during 2016 over 2015 was 9.7% as compared to 4.5% during 2015 over 2014.
- The share of India in international tourist arrivals in 2016 was 1.18%. India accounted for 4.72% of international tourist arrivals in Asia Pacific region in 2016, with rank 8th.
- Tourism continues to play an important role as foreign exchange earner for the country. In 2016, foreign exchange earnings from tourism were US \$22.92 billion as compared to US \$21.07 billion in 2015, registering a growth of 8.8%.

- Number of domestic tourist visits in India during 2016 was 1614 million as compared to 1432 million in 2015, with a growth rate of 12.68%

Spiritual Tourism

The word spirituality has been derived from the Latin word '*spiritus*' which means '*breath of life*' is related to spiritual practices for God. There are two different views about spirituality; one is desire or need to find out the connotation and purpose of one's own life to exist in the universe; other is a belief of supremacy of God, who controls the whole universe. India is the land where civilization first flourished. It is rich in traditions and places of spiritual significance. It is in India, where everything in nature is worshipped. Be it rivers, trees, mountains, forests; anything is claimed to be sacred. As a result, where ever these exist, that place becomes a sacred place with high spiritual significance. Everyone who has faith longs to visit all these places at least once in his life time. As a result, a large number of people from all over the world visit these places, and hence there is a need to develop these places and provide facilities to visitors.

Religious Tourism can be defined as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions and architecture. Being one of the most ancient civilizations of the world, India has been in contact with almost all the major religions of the world, and despite being dominated by Hinduism in the present context, religions like Islam, Buddhism and Christianity have also influenced a sizeable portion of the population, apart from niche religions like Sikhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Judaism that grew as an offshoot to the major religious schools of thought.

In the modern and busy life peoples are bearing from a lot of stress and become mentally disturbed and looking for solace in religious reading, meditation and moments of divine happiness. India has been known as the seat of spiritualism and India's cosmopolitan nature is best reflected in its pilgrim centers. Religion is the life-blood for followers of major religion and sects. Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity have lived here for centuries. The visible expression of religious is witnessed in the architecturally lavish temples, mosques, monasteries and Churches spreads across the length and breadth of the country. India is not only known as a place rich in its culture with varied attractions but also for many places of worship, present itself as embodiments of compassion where one get peace of mind.

Thus India has been respected as a destination for spiritual tourism for domestic and international tourists. It includes all the religions mentioned above; religious places associated with, emotional attachment to these centers and infrastructure facilities for the tourists. The essence of spiritual tourism belongs in internal feeling through worship. It should not be regulate by caste, creed and economic status or intellectual attainment of the recipient. Thus through spiritual tourism there is a sincere effort to bring better understanding among various nations and thus foster global integrity. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions of world. Over 5000 years of religious history created wonderful temples and survived through ages all over India.

Objectives

1. To spread awareness regarding Spiritual Tourism in India.
2. To analyse challenges and opportunities in Spiritual Tourism in India.
3. To analyse Spiritual Tourism as a tool for socio – economic development.

Literature Review

1. Kumar (2017)	The success the tourism industry will largely depend on the success of all strategic fronts. India must change their traditional approach to the market is more competitive and modern. India has to develop unique market position, brand and image that cannot be owned by another player. India can do it presents as a place of spirituality, meditation and yoga.
2. Suri & Rao (2014)	The spiritual destinations in India are not just mere tourist spots but they are a part of our heritage. Our civilization is considered one among the oldest and that too the finest of the civilizations. We have something in our past that is so enriched with cultural heritage that we have no match.
3. Shantakumari (2016)	A better understanding of spiritual tourism, wellness and quality of life considerations is essential for the development of proper relationship marketing strategies. The increasing interest on spirituality travel, is not due primarily to its spiritual perspective, but rather for the potential it carries to develop as the largest segment within the global tourism industry.
4. Sharma & Agarwal (2016)	India, since ages, being a culturally diverse country has been well connected to all major beliefs and religions of the world and all the religious groups of the country has constructed various niche forms of religious tourism in India, which eventually molded various religious centers like Temples, Gurudwaras, Mosques, Churches, and other major art, traditions, culture and architecture.
5. Bansal & Gautam (2014)	The study has clearly identified areas of interest that appeal to the spiritual aspects of travel and it is left to the administrators and the travel professionals to pick up this information as accurate and universally applicable data are indispensable for marketing and promotions. In absence of modern places, peoples linked tourism to the religious places in the ancient time. On the basis of above discussion we can conclude that spiritual tourism has great potential to

	develop the tourism industry in all dimensions.
6. Banerjee (2015)	An extensive market research programme should be launched in the target source markets and tourism products developed to cater to the interests of each source market. An effective and ongoing market representation presence should be established with the travel trade in each source market and an Internet portal should be set up in various languages to provide information. The government should represent India as a destination of yoga and spirituality. Various policies should be made to encourage the tourists from the various parts of the globe.
7. Suri & Rao (2014)	The spiritual destinations in India are not just mere tourist spots but they are a part of our heritage. Our civilization is considered one among the oldest and that too the finest of the civilizations. We have something in our past that is so enriched with cultural heritage that we have no match. Selling the same should be easy not difficult.

Challenges in Spiritual Tourism

Tourism acts as a crucial enabler in facilitating development of basic infrastructural facilities, generates income for the local community as well as the government, balances regional development strategies through 'umbrella' effect, and fosters peace and socio-cultural harmony. However, tourism development in any region needs to be regulated to prevent the negative impacts. Major challenges include –

1. **Problem of Carrying Capacity** - Most religious centres in the country, major or minor, suffer from short but intense seasons that alter the dynamics of the region for the rest of the year. The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand is one such example. Lasting from May till about November, it puts a serious pressure upon the transport infrastructure of the Garhwal region, which coupled with the monsoons and a lot of road construction still under progress imply landslides, meaning frequent road blocks, accidents and loss of life.

2. **Waste Management** - In part a derivative of the problem of carrying capacity, the waste management problem has aggravated as science and technology grew to usher us into the 'era of plastic'.
3. **Lack of proper infrastructure:** infrastructure needs for the travel and tourism range from physical infrastructure such as part of entry to modes of transport to urban infrastructure such as access roads electricity, water supply, telecommunications etc. The sector related to the travel and tourism industry includes airlines surface transports accommodation and infrastructure and facilitation system. The poor infrastructure has been a major reason why the international tourist has been skipping the country.
4. **Security & safety:** - India is highly lacking on this attribute of competitiveness. The major reasons being the internal community riots and also the terrorist attacks faced from time to time. The country is highly unsafe for females and there is poor discipline as well as political instability in the country.
5. **Information & communication:** - Though the official languages of the republic of India are Standard Hindi and English yet the government of India has given 22 languages of the 8th schedule the status of official languages. Because of such diversity in the regional languages the foreign tourist has to face the problem of communication with the locals.

Prospects in Spiritual Tourism

1. **Developing Religious Tourist Circuits** - One of the first steps in this aspect is to create nodes near religious centers, where there is already a basic infrastructure present and plan day trips from there. For example, Chennai in South India can be a node for excursions to Madurai, Thanjavur, Trichnapalli and Pondicherry. Madurai is the home of the exquisite Meenakshi Temple, which is regarded as the holiest temple in India by many people. As the influx of crowd is already sizeable in famous spots, a hub and spoke model will ensure tourist spread to all the nearby attractions.
2. **Developing adequate Infrastructure** - Infrastructure development requires that religious tourism circuits be identified and State Government is required to streamline the development of the entire religious tourism circuit existing in a given region/area.
3. **Scenic beauty:** India is a land of great tourism potential. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, every region has its own uniqueness and favour - be it cold/hot desert (Ladakh/Rajasthan), rivers (Ganges and Brahmaputra), forests (Niligiri & North East), islands (Andaman and Nicobar) each landform bound to mesmerize tourists. Moreover, the wide variety in the landscape offers a range of choices to tourists from within India and the abroad. Apart from the natural landscapes, the cultural heritage spread across the country also offers huge potential for the development of tourism in the country.
4. **Domestic Tourists:** India is the second most populous country in the world with over 1.25 billion populations. In other words, they offer a minimum of potential 1.25 billion tourist visits if the right policies and the infrastructure are in place. Taking a cue from the Mann Ki Baath of Prime Minister Mr Modi, the policy makers should look 'inward' and come up with appropriate strategies to tap the domestic tourist potential.
5. **Proper Promotion** – Proper and adequate amount of promotion of spiritual places, connecting with inner peace of a person will attract many tourist both international and domestic.

Conclusion

Spiritual Tourism is the largest contributor in over all tourist industry, and one of the largest employment generating industry. India by far is one of the largest country, especially in terms of population and has tremendous potential in tourism, attracting both International as well domestic tourists. Tourism not only creates jobs in the tertiary sector, it also encourages growth in the primary and secondary sectors of industry. Hence, it is high time, the government should encourage the participation of the private sector in a big way for the all round development of the tourism sector that has the potential to act as the key driver of inclusive growth. Despite of huge potential in tourism in terms of different and varied places of attraction, India is lacking in International footfall in Tourism due to various constrains and if these constrains are reduced than it can create huge impact on Economy.

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