

Impact of Religious Tourism in India: An Outline

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Abstract

Religious tourism is a noteworthy component of the Indian tourism industry. It is drawing millions of visitors to its diverse array of religious sites every year from various parts of the world. The visitors dig up emotional feelings from ancient temples and mosques to sacred reverse and pilgrimage trails. India offers a rich tapestry of spiritual experiences for travelers of all faiths. Religious tourism in India could explore various aspects, including the historical and cultural significance of different religious places. It has a vital impact on local economy including local livelihood earnings, infrastructural development to support religious tourism and preservation of heritage. The role of government and religious institutions in promoting tourism practice may be the key for successes of the religious tourism. The present study aims to explore the overall impact of religious tourism in India on the basis of available secondary data.

Keywords: Tourism Industry, Religious Tourism, Temple, Mosques, Spiritual Experiences, Local Community & Economic Development etc.

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I. Introduction:

India's vibrant culture is deeply intertwined with its thriving religious tourism industry. The country's long and storied history has given rise to a diverse array of sacred sites that draw pilgrims and visitors from around the world. These hallowed spaces serve not only as places of worship and spiritual contemplation, but also as windows into India's profound religious traditions and architectural wonders. India's religious tourism is marked by its remarkable diversity. The country is a mosaic of numerous faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity, among others. Each religion has its own sacred sites, pilgrimage destinations, and festivals that draw in devoted followers as well as intrigued travelers.

1.1 Some of the Most Prominent Religious Attractions in India:

Varanasi: Varanasi, an ancient city along the revered Ganges River, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited places. It holds great significance for Hindus as the purported home of Lord Shiva. Millions of devotees journey here to bathe in the sacred waters and participate. .



Tirupati: Located in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, Tirupati is home to the famous Sri Venkateswara Temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu. It is one of the most prosperous and frequently visited holy sites globally, drawing millions of devotees each year.

Golden Temple: The Golden Temple, also called Sri Harmandir Sahib, is the most sacred site for Sikhs. Located in Amritsar, Punjab, it welcomes people of all faiths. The temple is known for its beautiful architecture and the community kitchen that serves free meals to thousands of visitors every day.

Bodh Gaya: A small town located in Bihar holds immense significance as the place where Buddha sought the path to enlightenment. Sitting beneath the ancient Bodhi tree, he reached a profound state of understanding. This holy site attracts pilgrims worldwide, drawn to the sacred Mahabodhi Temple Complex. Recognized by UNESCO for its cultural value.

Ajmer Sharif Dargah: In the heart of Ajmer, Rajasthan stands the revered Ajmer Sharif Dargah. This sacred shrine honors the esteemed Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti, drawing countless pilgrims year-round, transcending religious boundaries.

Recognizing the profound significance of religious tourism, the Indian government has embarked on a multifaceted endeavor. Enhancing infrastructure, improving accessibility to sacred sites, and curating captivating religious festivals and cultural events are among the key initiatives. Moreover, concerted efforts are underway to meticulously preserve and conserve heritage monuments, enriching the overall experience for visitors to cherish.

India's spiritual tapestry invites travelers on a profound journey. Sacred sites foster introspection and cultural exchange, transcending boundaries. Inspiring landmarks captivate pilgrims worldwide, promoting unity amidst diversity. Religious tourism here nourishes the soul, cultivating peace, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding among all faiths. It's a transformative experience that enriches lives.

1.2 Various Reasons for Significance of Religious Tourism in India:

- i. **Cultural Heritage Preservation:** Many religious sites in India hold immense historical and cultural significance, serving as custodians of ancient traditions, art and architecture. The influx of pilgrims ensures the preservation and maintenance of these sites safeguarding India's rich cultural heritage.
- ii. **Economic Impact:** Religious tourism contributes significantly to India's economy by generating revenue through accommodation, transportation, food, souvenirs, and other services. It also creates job opportunities for locals particularly in rural areas surrounding pilgrimage sites.
- iii. **Spiritual experience:** Many people undertake religious journeys to seek spiritual fulfillment, enlightenment, or blessings from revered deities. India's sacred sites provide a serene and contemplative environment conducive to meditation and introspections.
- iv. **Promoting tolerance and understanding:** Religious tourism fosters cultural exchange and promotes tolerance by exposing visitors to different belief systems and practices. It encourages dialogue and mutual respect among people of diverse backgrounds.
- v. **Preservation of heritage:** The tourist of religious sites often leads to preservation efforts for future generation to appreciate.

II. Literature Review:

Many studies have been done by several researchers and academicians on the diverse aspects of religious tourism in India. Some of them are presented below.

Manhas and Nair (2020) on his ‘Strategic Role of Religious Tourism in Recuperating the Indian Tourism Sector Post-Covid-19’ we know that the idea of religious travel has existed for as long as humans have. Travelers have traveled to a variety of religious locations throughout history. Religious tourism has been a part of the human experience since the beginning of recorded time. People have long felt compelled to visit places of spiritual significance, reflecting the deep-rooted connection between faith and exploration. This practice has endured across cultures and through the ages, demonstrating the profound)

Jude, et al. (2018) in his researcher’s paper ‘Impact of religious tourism in host community: the case of awhum monestary’ The Awhum monastery brought joy to its people. Initially, residents welcomed the monastery as it offered employment and development. However, as time passed, a land dispute arose between the monastery and I bite village. This conflict overshadowed the earlier blessings felt by the Awhum community. The once revered monastery now faced skepticism from locals due to the ongoing disagreement over land ownership. What was once a source of pride becoming a source of tension.

Verma and Sarangi (2019) wanted to tell that researchers have not extensively explored the factors that influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty in religious tourism events. To address this gap, the current study developed a comprehensive framework to examine the intricate relationships among five key elements: motivation, service quality, safety, satisfaction, and event loyalty. The study conducted a survey in the Mela area, collecting data from 2,326 respondents using a structured questionnaire.

Gupta and Gahalot (2023) the concept of journey to Vrindavan has evolved. What was once a trek to the divine's homeland has now become more of a vacation and recreational hub. This shift has sparked intriguing opportunities for investors and developers, leading to increasing urbanization and a notable departure from the customary pilgrimage rituals that were historically practiced.

Budovich (2023) demonstrated the significant impact of religious tourism on Russia's economy and tourism industry through quantitative analysis. This finding deserves the attention of cultural and tourism policy makers.

III. Objectives of the Study:

The objective of the study is to present an over view of the impact of religious tourism in India.

IV. Methodology:

The present study is descriptive in nature. It is based on secondary data. The data have been collected from various research publications, articles, journals, reports, books, Government reports on Indian tourism and various websites. The study period is from 2020- 2021 to 2021-22 on the basis of availability of data.

V. Analysis and Discussions:

5.1 Religious Visit in India in 2020-21: Visit of foreign and domestic tourists in various religious places in India have been shown the table below:

Table- 1 Foreign Tourists Visits in India for the Purpose of Religious Tourism (2020-21)			
Country of Nationality	Total Tourist Arrivals in India [In numbers]	For Pilgrimage Purpose in [%]	Number of pilgrimages
CANADA	80437	2.7	2171
USA	429860	7.5	32239
ARGENTINA	530	8.3	44
BRAZIL	2055	7.9	162
AUSTRIA	4411	3.8	168
ITALY	13659	3.3	450
SPAIN	6982	5.7	397
UKRAIN	5197	13.0	675
OMAN	10174	14.5	1475
NEPAL	52544	71.9	37779
BANGLADESH	240554	3.9	9381
BHUTAN	6081	23.1	1009
SRILANKA	25989	16.6	4314

(Source: India Tourism Statistics 2020-21, Ministry of Tourism Government of India)

Observation: From the above table, it has been observed that 71.9% of the tourists have visited from Nepal whereas 2.7% of the tourists have visited from Canada to India. Except Nepal, all others country's tourist's arrival in India has been decreased due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

5.2 Religious Visit in India in 2021-22: Visit of foreign and domestic tourists in various religious places in India have been shown the table below:

Table-2 Foreign Tourists Visits in India for the Purpose of Religious Tourism (2021-22)

Country of Nationality	Total Tourist Arrivals in India [In numbers]	For Pilgrimage Purpose in [%]	Number of Pilgrimages
CANADA	122868	54.4	66840
USA	394092	41.2	162365
ARGENTINA	4294	89.7	3851
BRAZIL	8092	71.2	5761
AUSTRIA	9182	55.7	5113
ITALY	31186	59.3	18493
SPAIN	16335	63.0	10291
UKRAIN	10619	80.9	8590
OMAN	15430	66.3	10230
NEPAL	40822	74.4	30371
BANGLADESH	549273	74.9	41140
BHUTAN	7901	45.8	3618
SRILANKA	68646	63.3	43453

(Source: India Tourism Statistics 2021-22, Ministry of Tourism Government of India)

Observation: From the above table, it has been observed that 89.7% of the tourists have visited from Argentina whereas 41.2% of the tourists have visited from USA to India. There is an improvement in the parentage of visit in India after Covid-19 is over.

Table-3 Nation wise Highest and Lowest Arrival of Foreign Tourists Visits in India for the Purpose of Religious Tourism during 2020-21 to 2021-22

Country	Table-1(%)	Table-2 (%)	Differences (%)
NEPAL	71.9%	74.4%	2.5%
BHUTAN	23.1%	45.8%	22.7%
SRILANKA	16.6%	63.3%	46.7%
CANADA	2.5%	54.4%	51.9%

(Source: Compiled by researcher)

Observation: The above table of tourist arrival in India for pilgrimage purpose was different in 2021 and 2022 from some countries. The percentage of tourist visit was increased during 2022 than in 2021. In case of Nepal the tourist flow increased by 2.5% and from Canada it's 51.9%. In case of Nepal the difference of flow of tourist is not remarkable but in case of Canada it is to some extent higher, and the cause behind the difference is Covid-19.

VI. Findings of the Study:

From the above table, it is proved that Pilgrimage tourism industry playing an important role to development of our country wealth and society. Today, religious tourism has entered into the world trade and is increasing day by day. Religious tourism attracts domestic and foreign capital. Religious tourism in India to grow at a CAGR 16% by 2023. According to Ministry of Tourism data religious tourism witnessed 1439 million tourists in 2022 and the place of religious tourism earned 1.34 lakh crore in the same year. The sector is expected to generate a revenue of 59 billion by 2028, creating 140 million temporary and permanent job by 2030.

VII. Conclusion:

Religious tourism can provide the opportunity for travelers a tourist to get excellent knowledge about different religions in religious place. India's religious tourism significantly impacts its economy, society, culture, and the environment. It contributes a substantial amount to the tourism industry and local economies. A study by Delhi based National Council for Applied Economic Researcher (NCAER) shows that of the 230 million tourist trips undertaken in India, the largest proportion is made up of religious pilgrimage. Over time, data shows a

steady increase in income from religious tourism in India. This suggests that it is becoming an increasingly important part of the country's economy.

VIII. Suggestions:

In order to promote and develop the religious tourism in India following vital points are being suggested from the present study.

- i. Sustainable Tourism Practices:** To reduce the harmful effects of religious tourism on the environment and local communities, adopt ecofriendly practices. These practices should focus on managing waste, saving energy, and protecting the cultural and natural treasures of religious destinations.
- ii. Infrastructure Development:** To boost religious tourism, it's crucial to invest in infrastructure projects at religious sites. This includes improving access, accommodation, transportation, and visitor services.
- iii. Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Involve local communities in decision-making processes and ensure that the benefit of religious tourism activities. Develop community-based tourism initiatives that empower local residents economically and socially.
- iv. Heritage Conservation:** Make sure to protect and conserve religious heritage sites, monuments, and artifacts by giving them top priority.
- v. Promotion of Responsible Tourism:** Educate tourists about responsible behavior and cultural sensitivity when visiting religious sites.
- vi. Diversification of Tourism Products:** Encourage the diversification of tourism products and experiences beyond religious pilgrimage, including cultural tours, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and wellness tourism.

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