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India's Tourism Sector in 2024-25: A Strategic Analysis

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Abstract

Tourism in India has been a major economic driver and soft power instrument that has integrated economic growth, cultural exchange, and job creation through tourism. The Annual Report 202425 by the Ministry of Tourism has shown strong recovery and development trend since the COVID-19 period. In this study, the researcher reviews the important statistics, policy frameworks, infrastructural projects, and digital plans influencing the tourism sector in India. It specifically focuses on Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and PRASHAD programmes, e-Visa reform, domestic travel pattern and tourism contribution to GDP and employment. The results emphasize an all round changing strategy that makes India a competitive, inclusive and sustainable global destination. Policy measures—including the expansion of the e-Visa regime, digital portals, and skill-development initiatives—have further enhanced accessibility, service quality, and employability. Despite its progress, the sector faces challenges such as seasonality, infrastructure gaps, and safety concerns. The study concludes that India's tourism trajectory is increasingly oriented toward sustainability, inclusivity, and technology-driven growth, positioning the country as a competitive global tourism destination.

Keywords: Tourism Development, Swadesh Darshan, PRASHAD Scheme, India Tourism 2024, Digital Tourism, Foreign Tourist Arrivals, Domestic Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Incredible India, e-Visa India.

Introduction

The tourism industry in India has experienced a transformation over the past few years and this has been driven not only by a combination of proactive policy making but also through digital innovation and infrastructure development. The ministry of tourism has accepted the role of being an agent of promoting local and international tourism. Through developing collaborations between the government and the private sector, and through launching the specific initiatives, including Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and PRASHAD, India is becoming a more attractive spot of year-long tourism. The proposed research paper is based on the information provided in the Ministry of Tourism Annual Report 202425 and intends to break down the performance, strategy, and the national economy implications of the tourism business.

Objectives

1. To consider the trends in the development of foreign and domestic tourism in India in 2024 25.
2. To discuss the economic value of the tourism industry, the contribution to the GDP and employment.
3. To analyse some of the major government programs such as Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and PRASHAD in enhancing infrastructure development and cultural conservation.
4. To determine how digitalization and policy changes contribute to improving the services and accessibility of tourism.
5. To emphasize issues experienced in the industry as well as propose measures in the growth of tourism in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Tourism Statistics: Visual Overview



Figure: Growth in Foreign Tourist Arrivals and Foreign Exchange Earnings (2023–2024).

Foreign and Domestic Tourism Trends

The 9.66 million Foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India in 2024 documented a growth of 19.8 percent as compared to the year before. This steep increase points to the fact that international travel is recovering after the pandemic with the help of the strengthened marketing and loosened visa requirements. The FTAs also portray that India is becoming more visible on the world tourism map with the help of campaigns of Incredible India brand. Tourism is also an important factor in the flow of foreign earnings in the country with the foreign exchange earnings amounting to 2,77,842 crore.

What is also remarkable is the size of domestic tourism. In 2023, 2,509.13 million domestic tourist visits were recorded in India, which reflects the growing interest in exploration of the local population among the Indian population. Such campaigns as the campaign Dekho Apna Desh have made people feel proud and interested in discovering the diverse landscapes and traditions of India and its heritage. Domestic tourism is a potent source of inclusive economic growth since it has led to income in rural and remote locations and helped local economies.

Economic Impact

According to the Tourism Satellite Account of 202223 provided by the Ministry 5 per cent of the GDP and 12.57 per cent of the total employment can be attributed to tourism. These figures underscore the position of the sector as a source of not only revenue, but also as a significant source of employment in various fields, such as the hospitality sector, transport sector, crafts sector and event management sector. Tourism provides a scalable way to create employment opportunities in India with a large population base particularly to the youth and women and to accelerate the growth of the region.

Infrastructure and Destination Development

They have been well-developed through the Swadesh Darshan program, which was initiated in 201415. Under this scheme, 76 projects worth ₹5,292.91 crore were approved in the country out of which 75 projects have been physically accomplished. Swadesh Darshan 2.0, which was introduced in 202324, is aimed at sustainable tourism and experiential travel, and authorizes the 34 projects with ₹793.20 crore. Some of these projects are eco-tourism experiences, spiritual circuits and cultural heritage parks whereby there is a transition in tourism development to quality and sustainability.

Spiritual and heritage tourism is what has been the focus of PRASHAD scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive). In December 2024, 48 projects have been approved in 27 states and union territories and carry an overall outlay of 1646.99 crore, of which 1036.96 crore have been disbursed. PRASHAD has already completed 25 projects which have helped improve infrastructure in major pilgrimage destinations thus making the experience of the visitors better and help the local economies who rely on religious tourism.

Policy and Digital Reforms

The growth in the e-Visa regime in India has been the major force that has led to the rise in inbound tourism. By December 2024, 9 categories of e-Visa facilities are offered to the citizens of 167 countries, such as tourist, medical, business, and conference visas. Visa fee rationalization has also seen India become a cheaper destination to the low-end traveller with fees as low as ten dollars during the lean season.

The Incredible India Digital Portal has been innovated in parallel to serve as a travel solution with the aim to provide details on destinations, itineraries and services. The portal will be supplemented with 24x7 multilingual support helplines and live chat interface. Moreover, a new e-market place site can enable certified tourist guides and facilitators to list and make themselves directly accessible to tourists. This improves transparency, services and accessibility especially to foreigners.

Capacity Building and Skilling

The Ministry promotes a dynamic skilling ecosystem to achieve the high level of hospitality and service. By 2024, 56 central-supported Institutes of Hotel Management and 13 Food Craft Institutions are operating. Moreover, Central IHMs have signed 52 MOUs with big hotel chains (Taj, Marriott, and ITC) to enhance collaboration in the industry and on-the-job training.

Incredible India Tourist Facilitator (IITF) Certification Programme provides online training on tour guides and facilitators on centralized basis. This professionalizes the workforce as well as enhances employment opportunities in the underserved areas. The objective is furthered with the opening of the digital tourism employment platform in 2022 which allows direct bookings and interaction with customers on the certified facilitators.

Established Advertisements and Diversity

Advertisement programs have been changed to active engagement rather than passively advertising. Dekho Apna Desh deploys social media campaigns, webinars and quizzes to promote domestic tourism. The 2024 campaign "People Choice" was a campaign that gathered the views of the population to come up with the best destinations in the various categories such as adventure, heritage, and nature. The Ministry has taken steps such as Paryatan Mitra and Paryatan Didi to reflect its inclusiveness towards the concept of tourism by engaging women and youth in the facilitation of tours to pilot destinations.

Difficulties and Strategic Advices

Although the improvement is commendable, the sector continues to experience challenges. Tourism in India remains seasonal where traffic is limited to holidays and festivals. Infrastructure is also very limited in many of the areas particularly in remote and ecologically sensitive areas. More multilingual and better safety systems, particularly to women and foreign travellers are also needed.

To resolve these challenges, the government should keep on offering more choices in tourism in order to create year-round tourism destinations such as wellness and rural circuits. The coordination of activities between ministers should be

enhanced to create an easier flow in conducting tourism projects. Lastly, Tourism Satellite Accounts should be intensified by increased and more comprehensive Tourism Satellite Accounts to inform evidence-based policy-making.

Conclusion

Tourism in India in 2024–25 will be a combination of strategic vision, based on the policy, and inclusive development. The country has emerged as a competitive with domestic mobility, robust infrastructure projects, and technology-induced service delivery is on the rise, and it has a culturally diverse destination. In future the success of the tourism model in India will rely on its sustainability, flexibility and community-focused approach.

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Conflicts of interest

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