Experiencing India's Diverse Tourism Offerings

This editorial is based on **"Unlocking the potential of hospitality"** which was published in Financial Express on 06/01/2023. It talks about the Tourism Sector in India and related issues.

For Prelims: Presidency of G20, Cultural Exchange, Cultural Heritage Sites, Eco-tourism, Himalayan regions, Unsustainable tourism, Pollution, Puri in Odisha, Hampi in Karnataka, Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Draft National Tourism Policy 2022, Dekho Apna Desh Initiative, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, Public-private partnerships.

For Mains: Significance of the Tourism Sector in India, Challenges Related to the Tourism Sector in India, Recent Initiatives Related to Tourism in India.

Tourism **is seen as a major driving force for any economy** over the world. It has a multiplier effect on associated industries like **hospitality.** The spillover of earnings from tourism into other industries does not only improve the **economic conditions** but also **enhances standards of living of the local population.**

But there are several challenges related to the tourism sector in India, like **infrastructural deficit, unsustainability, climate change and pollution.**

While India takes on the **presidency of the G20** and starts preparing for the **summit in 2023**, positioning the country as a safe, **tourist-friendly destination** hinges on how the government can work together with the industry and provide a **world-class experience** to visiting dignitaries.

What is the Significance of the Tourism Sector in India?

- **Economic Benefits:** Tourism generates **revenue through the sale of goods and services to tourists**, such as accommodation, transport, and heritage attractions.
  - This can **stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities** in the tourism sector and related industries.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Tourism provides an opportunity for **cultural exchange**, as visitors from different parts of the world can learn about and experience India's diverse cultures and traditions.
- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Tourism can also help to preserve **cultural heritage sites**, such as **temples, forts, and palaces, by providing the funds needed for their maintenance and restoration.**
- **Environmental Benefits:** In some cases, tourism can also have environmental benefits, such as through the **development of** eco-tourism **initiatives** that promote the conservation of natural areas.
- **Social Benefits**: Tourism can also bring social benefits to local communities, such as through the creation of **employment opportunities** and the **provision of social infrastructure, such as schools and healthcare facilities.**

What are the Challenges Related to the Tourism Sector in India?

- **Safety and Security Issues:** India has faced challenges with regard to the **safety and security of tourists,** particularly in certain areas of the country.
  - This can **deter tourists from visiting certain destinations and** can also impact the overall perception of India as a tourist destination.
- **Lack of Human Resource:** Since **tourism is a labour-intensive industry,** practical training is of utmost importance. However, as the **tourism sector in India has grown, the availability of trained professionals has not kept pace.**
  - Due to a **lack of multilingual trained guides** and an inadequate understanding of the benefits and responsibilities associated with tourism among locals, the sector's growth is restricted.
- **Unsustainable Tourism:** In India, especially in the **Himalayan regions**, where resources are already scarce, **unsustainable tourism** often puts pressure on natural resources through overconsumption of natural resources.
  - Additionally, **unsustainable tourism affects local land use,** causing soil erosion, **increased** pollution**,** and the destruction of endangered species' habitats.
- **Lack of Connectivity:** There are many places in India that remain unexplored because of inadequate surveys, infrastructure, and connectivity, resulting in **lukewarm attitudes towards domestic travel.**
  - As an example, despite the **Northeast's breathtaking natural beauty,** it is not often **included in domestic or international tourists' travel plans** because of a **lack of connectivity** with the rest of the country as well as a lack of infrastructure and necessary facilities.
- **Pollution and Climate Change:** Our major **tourist sites (heritage sites)** are also affected by pollution. India still struggles to protect its wonder, **Taj Mahal**, from pollution. There have been floods in India in recent years, including in places where **heritage sites are located, as a result of** climate change**.**
  - Example: **Puri in Odisha** and **Hampi in Karnataka**

What are the Recent Initiatives Related to Tourism in India?

- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**
- **Draft National Tourism Policy 2022**
- **Dekho Apna Desh Initiative**
- **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat**

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Tourism Infrastructure Development:** Investing in the development of infrastructure, such as **roads, airports, and hotels**, would make it easier for tourists to access and travel around different parts of the country.
  - This could be done through **public-private partnerships** or through government investment.
- **Focusing on Safety and Security:** Improving safety and security for tourists is essential for the growth of the tourism sector in India.
  - This could be achieved through measures such as the **deployment of tourism police, the implementation of security protocols at tourist attractions,** and the promotion of safe travel practices.
- **Sustainable Tourism:** To address the issue of **overcrowding and the impact on the environment,** the tourism industry could focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices.
  - This could include initiatives such as promoting **off-season travel, supporting local businesses,** and preserving natural and cultural heritage sites.
- **Visa Simplification:** Streamlining the visa application process and making it more **accessible for foreign tourists would encourage more people to visit India.**
  - This could be done through the implementation of online visa systems and the expansion

of **visa-on-arrival programs.**
- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Providing **cultural sensitivity training for tourists** and tourism industry professionals could help to **reduce misunderstandings and promote respect for local cultures and traditions.**
  - This could be done through the **development of educational materials** and the inclusion of cultural sensitivity training in tourism industry training programs.
- **Creating a Unified Tourism Portal**: A rigorous **market research and evaluation exercise can be conducted in order to identify desired tourist destinations** across the nation.
  - **It can be followed by developing a digital unified system (promoting the essence of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat),** to map these places and promote them through social media.
- **Opportunity for India:** Considering **India's rich heritage and culture,** an unmatched diversity of **cuisine tourism** can be an effective tool for enhancing India's soft power and attracting foreign revenue. India's philosophy of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** gives it an unwavering belief in multilateralism.
  - Recent **Dharamshala Declaration** recognizes India's potential for supporting **global tourism and also promoting domestic tourism.**

Drishti Mains Question

Tourism has the potential to be a key driver of economic growth and development in India, but it also has the potential to create negative impacts on the environment and local communities. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q.1 How can the mountain ecosystem be restored from the negative impact of development initiatives and tourism? **(2019)**

Q.2 The states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are reaching the limits of their ecological carrying capacity due to tourism. Critically evaluate. **(2015)**